

South Asian Partition Fiction in English

*From Khushwant Singh
to Amitav Ghosh*

RITUPARNA ROY



AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Rituparna Roy

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*To my parents,
Prof. Birendra Narayan Roy & Prof. Kalpana Roy
... the only gift I can give...*

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Acknowledgements

I was greatly fascinated by the story of 'India's struggle for independence' in secondary school and cheerfully devoured entire sections of the History syllabus for my exams. Much later, I learnt that what I so loved reading at school was the 'nationalist narrative' of modern Indian history – and that it told an incomplete story. History gave me all the facts about Independence at school, but it was at university that literature introduced me to the Partition.

The original idea for this work came while I was doing my post-graduate studies at Calcutta University (1995-97) in English Literature with a specialization in Indian Writing in English. That is when it struck me how many of the most significant Indian-English novels dealt with the theme of partition – and how differently. Hence, when I landed a doctoral fellowship soon after, I knew exactly what to work on.

This work – from the nascent idea of the original thesis to the finished manuscript of the monograph based on it – has spanned an entire decade, and became associated with all the landmarks of my personal and professional life. It also went places – starting from Calcutta, it travelled with me briefly to Bangalore and Chennai, and finally, leaving India's shores, ended its (tortuously long, bumpy, jerky and singularly unpredictable) journey in Amsterdam.

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Introduction

Undivided India, which freed itself from the colonial yoke, and the event of the Partition of the subcontinent are inextricably bound together. Thus, no post-colonial denizen of the subcontinent possessing a sense of history and living in the post-independence era can ignore the pervasive influence and impact of the Partition on contemporary life. Undoubtedly the most important determining factor in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh's destiny, the Partition is much more than a historical fact, however, for it has served and continues to serve as a compelling literary theme that has engendered a substantial body of fiction on the subcontinent, fiction that is startling in terms of its diversity of focus, style and treatment.

This book will attempt to study a wide cross-section of Partition novels spanning three-and-a-half decades of the literature written in English on the subcontinent, novels written between the mid-1950s and late 1980s. The aim of this study will be to explore the variety of this body of fiction and thereby to try and uncover the manifold intentions that prompted the different novelists to write about the Partition in the way that they did. The novels which will form the subject matter of this investigation are Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* (1989), Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988). But before embarking on a detailed discussion of the representation of the Partition in the six novels mentioned above, it is important to look at some of the theories of partition that have been advanced by historians, the reason they think why it happened.

Theories of partition – why/when/ironies

Official histories of Pakistan subscribe to the 'two nations' theory and argue that the Pakistani nation was the inevitable crystallization of the desire of the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent to remain a distinctive community, separate from the Hindu population around them. A characteristic and particularly passionate articulation of this theory is to

be found in Aitzaz Ahsan's *The Indus Saga and the Making of Pakistan*.¹ According to Ahsan, the Indian subcontinent is made up of two civilizations, Indus and Indic (or Gangetic), and 'Indus has been one large, independent, politico-economic zone for the past countless centuries (...) [It has had] a rich and glorious cultural heritage of its own (...) [and is] a distinct and separate nation' (1996: 18).

Completely differently, the community of historians belonging to the main current of Indian nationalism blamed Imperialism for tearing the two communities apart, disrupting the bonds that had joined them together for centuries. According to this perspective, the Partition of the Indian subcontinent was the logical conclusion of the 'divide and rule' policy of the British by which they had insidiously played off the Hindus against the Muslims in India. According to some of India's most notable historians (including A.K. Banerjee², Sumit Sarkar³ and Bipan Chandra⁴), this was a political strategy that the British had hit upon from the time of the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and had pursued with a single-minded zeal ever since. However, it is important to note that while both these theories, propounded as part and parcel of the ideology of post-colonial nation states, have had wide popular support, neither of them can provide an adequate explanation of the central event of the Partition in modern South Asian history. Many British observers, of course, saw the whole thing quite differently. British imperialists in particular prided themselves on their fostering of the unity of India during British rule, and blamed primordial divisions among the Indians themselves for the division and bloodshed that marked the last days of the empire.

Intimately related to the issue of *why* the Partition happened is the question of *who* was (or were) responsible for it. And among the most prominent Indian leaders of the time, more often than not, the finger is usually pointed at Mohammad Ali Jinnah. In India, he is seen not as the father of Pakistan but as a collaborator of the Raj; a man who, in his capacity as the leader of the All India Muslim League, precipitated the division of India by being willing to accept nothing short of a sovereign state for the Muslims in the subcontinent in the final negotiations with the British that led to the transfer of power in 1947.⁵ Rather differently, Pakistani historian Ayesha Jalal, in a pioneering study of the statesman⁶, has proposed a counter-thesis to this notion by saying that the Partition was forced upon Jinnah by the Congress High Command in the penultimate phase of the British rule in India. According to her⁷, the actual reason behind the Partition was not the scheme of the British but the constitutional tussle for greater representational power in the government that had gone on for close to four decades, between the Congress and the Muslim League.⁸ Yet, the man who remains the most controversial figure of that epochal time on the subcontinent is not any

Indian leader, but the British Viceroy himself, Lord Louis Mountbatten. From Alan Campbell-Johnson in the early 1950s⁹ and Philip Zeigler in the mid-1980s¹⁰, down to Stanley Wolpert in 2006¹¹, Mountbatten continues to interest and intrigue historians (mostly British). However, over the past six decades, his reputation has suffered, a change that is reflected in the very titles of his biographies/portraits – from Alan Campbell-Johnson’s very earnest *Mission with Mountbatten* to Andrew Roberts’ sarcastic ‘Lord Mountbatten and the Perils of Adrenalin’.¹²

The most recent attack on Mountbatten has been mounted by Sir Stanley Wolpert in *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India*, where he declares:

If for no other reason than to counter the many laudatory, fawning accounts of Lord Mountbatten’s ‘splendid’, “historically unique’, ‘brilliant and wonderful’ viceroyalty that have for more than half a century filled shelves of Partition literature and Mountbatten hagiography, I feel justified in adding my *Shameful Flight* to history’s list of the British Raj’s last years. [For among all the important players of that time] none (...) played as tragic or central a role as did Mountbatten.¹³ (2006: 2)

Yet another theory, advanced with great persuasion by Narendra Singh Sarila¹⁴ (who was ADC to Lord Mountbatten), claims that there was a crucial link between India’s Partition and British fears about the USSR gaining control of the oil fields of the Middle East. In other words, it was important to partition India to safeguard and consolidate British strategic interests in the Middle East. According to this theory, once the British leaders realized that the Indian nationalists (i.e. the Congress) would not join them to play the Great Game against the Soviet Union, they settled for those willing to do so (i.e. the Muslim League). In the process, they did not hesitate to use the Muslims of India as a political tool to fulfil their objectives.

The British historian, Nicholas Mansergh, interestingly has an entirely different take on the whole issue of the Partition. He is of the opinion that it was not so much the complexity of the communal situation as the nature of the political relations then existent in India that caused the catastrophe of 1947. To quote him,

The more important of those [political] relations were without exception triangular. There were the three principal communities, the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs, in descending order of magnitude; there were the three political groups, the princes, the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress in ascending order of importance; and there were the three arbiters of national

destiny, the British, the Congress and the League. In each triangle there was the predisposition – it is almost a law of politics – of the lesser to combine against the greatest.¹⁵ (1999: 220)

It is interesting to note that not only is there disagreement about *who* or *what* was responsible for the Partition, there are also differences among historians as to *when* it all started – the journey towards Partition – and which province (i.e. Punjab or Bengal) played the more decisive role in the enfolding drama.

According to David Page, in his work *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920-1932*¹⁶, the 1920s were a crucial period in the shaping of the subcontinent, in preparing the ground for the emergence of Pakistan and in casting the character of Indian nationalism. Page is of the opinion that a study of colonial strategy and structures at this time helps to explain how the building blocks of Pakistan were put in place, how it became possible for the various Muslim communities situated in different parts of India to see it as a common goal; and to understand the kind of contradictions involved during the Pakistan movement. The most startling proposition made in this book is, however, the argument that the development of representative institutions at this time (which provided first partial and later substantial provincial autonomy) should not be seen simply as concessions by the Raj to Indian nationalism but rather as a means of offsetting the nationalist challenge and the perpetuation of Imperial control.

Anita Inder Singh in *The Origins of the Partition of India 1936-1947*¹⁷ puts forward the thesis that:

1936 is a useful starting point [to discuss the Partition of India] as it furnishes the immediate background to the coalition controversy between the Congress and the League in UP in 1937, regarded by many as a milestone on the road to partition.¹⁸ (1987: v)

While Singh concedes that the Muslim League's demand for a sovereign Muslim state at its Lahore session in March 1940 was a great leap forward for the Pakistan cause, she argues that the most decisive step taken in this direction was the League's election campaign in the Punjab and its attempt to gain power in that province between 1944-47. She is of the opinion that unlike Bengal (where the League ministry had already been able to cultivate grass-roots support during the Second World War), the greatest electoral battles of the mid-1940s were fought in the Punjab, because 'the possibility of an intercommunal coalition in the Punjab posed the greatest threat, in the eyes of the League, to the emergence of Pakistan'¹⁹ (1987: vii).

On a different note, Joya Chatterji, in her book *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932-1947*²⁰, focuses her research on the political scenario in Bengal, and identifies the 1930s as the decade when the communalization of politics reached a new high in the province. Chatterji shows clearly how the prospect of a permanent subordination to a Muslim majority converted many Hindus to the idea that Bengal must be partitioned, and that Nehru and Patel in opting for a truncated Pakistan had the strong support of the provincial Congress in Bengal. Overturning popular notions about the state of Bengal politics at this time, Chatterji argues:

Bengalis were not passive bystanders in the politics of their province; nor were they victims of circumstances entirely out of their control, forced reluctantly to accept the division of their 'motherland'. On the contrary, a large number of Hindus of Bengal, backed up by the provincial branches of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, campaigned intensively in 1947 for the partition of Bengal and for the creation of a separate Hindu province that would remain inside an Indian union.²¹ (1994: 227)

It may be noted here that *Bengal Divided* was part of a new trend in partition studies (since the 1980s) which focused on regional instead of national politics²²; and where the primacy of all-India perspectives was replaced by a new importance given to regional and provincial contexts.²³ As Chatterji succinctly puts it in her 'Introduction':

This is not an argument that the determination of Bengali Hindus to see their province partitioned explains the decision to partition India. It suggests instead that the study of a provincial separatist demand may enrich our understanding of Partition, providing the subtext to a story too often reduced to an account of the priorities of statesmen in Delhi and London.²⁴ (1994: 17)

All these diverse viewpoints notwithstanding, it is an indubitable truth that the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, apart from being tragic, was also profoundly ironic as none of the three major players got what they wanted. Shorn off eastern Punjab and western Bengal (including Calcutta), Jinnah only got the 'maimed, mutilated and moth-eaten'²⁵ Pakistan which he had rejected out of hand in 1944 and then again in 1946. For the Congress, the final release from the British Empire came 'only by compromising on the two main principles of the Indian nationalist creed since the late 1920s – unity and full independence.'²⁶ For not only was India partitioned when she finally gained her freedom (entailing a total reversal of all that the Indian National Congress had stood

for), but her leaders also accepted 'Dominion Status' rather than the full independence to which they had been committed since the adoption of the 'Purna Swaraj' resolution at Lahore in 1929.

On their part, the British had definitely not envisaged the bloody transfer of power that eventually took place. The Partition of India was patently not in their interest, and neither the Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten nor the then Prime Minister, Clement Atlee, were in favour of it.²⁷ However, when it became clear to them that Partition was inevitable, the British, confident about the strength of their administration in India, decided on an organized operation. This was a most deplorable lack of foresight on their part, for they did not take into consideration the primordial communal passions that would be (and came to be) involved in forcibly uprooting people from the land they had been attached to for generations, and it was too late when they realized that the drawing of arbitrary borders was much more than an administrative exercise.²⁸ Consequently, they witnessed a complete breakdown of their own administration with most British officers of the British Indian Army and the Indian Civil Service having already left or in the process of leaving India, the Indian officers leaving their ranks (and sometimes joining the communal forces); and above all, the mass frenzy of the common populace, sworn to wreak havoc on each other. It brings to mind the very ironic words that Shahid Hamid (in *Disastrous Twilight*) quotes an unknown British Magistrate as saying: 'The British are a just people. They have left India in exactly the same state of chaos as they found it.'²⁹ Indeed, if the possession of India was the crowning glory of the British Empire, the Indian dominions 'the jewel in the crown', then the relinquishing of this empire, the way that the power was transferred from British to Indian hands in 1947, represented the crowning failure of that most steadfast pillar of the British Empire – its administration.

Historiography of the Partition

Today, the legacy of 1947 looms larger than ever before on the subcontinent. Partition has actually proved to be a trauma from which the subcontinent has never fully recovered. But sadly, this is not reflected in its history writing, a fact that is lamented by many. Alok Bhalla, for instance, in his 'Introduction' to a collection of Partition stories in English translation states that when it comes to Partition, 'there is not just a lack of great literature, there is, more seriously, a lack of great history'.³⁰ Indeed, if this is true to any extent, this is perhaps because Indian historiography has focused more on Independence than on Partition, more on the unifying force of nationalism than the divisive forces that rent the country in 1947. For a long time, Indian history writing followed

the traditional nationalist discourse in which the role of the great Congress leaders and the importance of national integration were always given pride of place. This particular discourse has been termed the 'Nehruvian narrative' of Indian history, and one cannot overemphasize the importance of Nehru's own books in fashioning this discourse. Such works of Nehru's as *An Autobiography*³¹ and *The Discovery of India*³² show how he viewed Indian history and how he reinterpreted it to create a modern secular nationalist discourse for the emerging independent state of India.

But while Nehru's commanding influence during the first two decades of Independence ensured that his vision held sway, after his death and with the steady decline in the power of the Congress Party, there was a gradual questioning of this discourse, particularly by the historians of the Subaltern school, which emerged in the late 1970s. Drawing their inspiration from the work of the Italian Marxist Gramsci, they sought to provide a counterbalance to traditional elite histories of nationalism by looking at the role of subordinate groups, whether as participants in the nationalist movement or as rebels against it.

It is important to note that while the Subalterns no doubt offered a useful critique of Indian nationalism, it is a fact that both elite historiography and subaltern history were geared towards nationalism and Independence. What got left out from the narratives of both was Partition. The nationalist narrative essentially told a story of the series of causes and happenings that led to Independence; the divisive forces that led to the Partition were by and large left untold. While the Subaltern School did try (in the words of David Page) to, 'search for alternative models that focused less on the unity which was imperative in confronting the Raj and more on the diversity which often underlay it'³³, one important strand was left out even by them – the experiences of women at the time of Partition. Later, however, the feminist perspective that gained prominence in the 1990s sought to address this long-standing lacuna in history writing in India.

This new approach was pioneered mostly by women authors, who saw Partition as a male narrative, in which women were sacrificed or abducted or recovered in a conflict which gave primacy to community and hierarchy at the expense of individual rights. Their work first attracted attention in 1993 with the publication of two articles in the *Economic and Political Weekly* looking at the role of the Indian state in the recovery of women abducted during Partition.³⁴ These articles highlighted the extraordinary sufferings that women went through at that time – in some cases killed by their own families to prevent them from falling into the hands of the other community; in other cases, raped and abducted, then recovered and rejected by their original families; in yet others, settling for a new life with their abductors only to have their

choices overturned by tribunals set up by agreement between the two new states.³⁵ This concentration on the role of women – as sufferers and victims – during Partition violence may rightly be regarded as constituting a new chapter in history writing in India.

Representation in literature

But even after noting and validating this new direction in historiography, historians generally agree that literature represented Partition better. For example, Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose, in their book on South Asian history, opine that:

The colossal human tragedy of the partition and its continuing aftermath has been better conveyed by the more sensitive creative writers and artists – for example in Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories and Ritwik Ghatak's films – than by historians.³⁶
(2004: 164)

But yet, here too, there was a long silence. Evidently, writers were at first unable to articulate the enormous tragedy that had unfolded in front of their eyes. And when they did, all they could write about initially was the violence that was the most distinctive feature of the time. Some of the earliest stories about the Partition written in Hindi and Urdu, for example, are clearly much too focused on scenes of carnage to produce anything other than a feeling of disgust in the reader, for all they seem to portray is the demented hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims at that time in India³⁷; and more often than not, they betray a bias in favour of one community over another.

Not all writers, of course, wrote in this way. Saadat Hasan Manto, for example, was free from any communal bias. This is amply evident from the slim volume of sketches or vignettes called *Siyah Hashye* that he published soon after the division of the country.³⁸ In this volume, except in one instance, none of the participants in the bloody drama of Partition is identified by religion, '(...) because, to Manto, what mattered was not what religion people had, what rituals they followed or which gods they worshipped, but where they stood as human beings'³⁹ (1997: xx).

As Alok Bhalla rightly notes,

Manto's stories about the partition are more realistic and more shocking records of those predatory times [than those of his contemporaries]. They are written by a man who knows that after

such ruination there can neither be any forgiveness nor any forgetting.⁴⁰ (1994: xvii)

It is also good to remember that the Urdu title *Siyah Hashye* which Manto gave his book means 'black fringe'. In other words, this was how Manto regarded the massive upheaval involving millions of refugees from both sides that preceded and followed Independence. If Independence, Manto seemed to say, was something bright and good, then it was fringed with black.

The IE Novel – Gandhian whirlwind/partition preoccupation/ Punjab bias

While Manto may have been the most well-known name to write on Partition, he was certainly not the only one. Besides him and a few of his contemporaries who wrote soon after Partition, there were many others who wrote much after the event. In fact, as has been pointed out by Meenakshi Mukherjee, the theme of Partition has been a 'pervasive' one in Indian bhasha literatures.⁴¹ This is true even of the Indian novel in English, though of course, English has had a totally different trajectory as a literary language in India. English, it must be remembered, was not a major language of literary production in colonial India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While it established itself as the language of administration and higher education in India, the novel in the country flourished in Hindi, Urdu, Bangla, Marathi and other bhashas. Only towards the end of British rule did this scenario change and that, too, very slowly. For even though the first Indian novel in English was published as far back as 1864 (Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*)⁴², and literary production in English continued throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with varying degrees of success, it was only in the 1930s that it became an established category.

There is a slight disagreement among scholars about the volume of literary output produced in English in India in the early decades of the twentieth century. According to Mukherjee Meenakshi, 'The Indo-Anglian novel made a different appearance in the nineteen twenties, then gradually gathered confidence and established itself in the next two decades'.⁴³ (2002: 19) Shankar Bhattacharya in the 'Introduction' to his book *Manohar Malgonkar: A Study of His Mind & Art*, argues however:

As against the assertion of Dr Mukherjee that there are 'hardly half a dozen Indo-Anglian novels', Gobinda Prasad Sharma in his book *Nationalism in Indo-Anglian Fiction*, has referred to

more than two dozen novels written and published before 1920.⁴⁴(1994: 2)

There is, however, no disagreement among critics about the significance of the 1930s in the development of the Indian-English novel. It emerged as a new creative force at that time, and the reasons for it were as much literary as political.

As is well known, the novel as a genre has traditionally been implicated in the construction and consolidation of the idea of the nation. The Indian novel in English has also in its brief history been visibly concerned with defining such a national identity. In fact, it is not '(...) a coincidence that the novel in English emerged in India in the 1930s, the decade prior to independence, when there was an urgency to foreground the idea of a composite nation' (2002: 173).⁴⁵ Indeed, it was not only political leaders, but also writers who helped in the foregrounding of this idea. It is important to emphasize here that the nationalist movement was not merely a political struggle but an all-pervasive emotional experience for Indian writers in the 1930s and 1940s. It had a tremendous impact on them, and they responded to the social and political turmoil of the times, albeit in different ways. In most of their work, there is a direct engagement with the Gandhian movement, a phenomenon that has been termed 'the Gandhian whirlwind'⁴⁶ in Indian-English fiction, and this trend actually continued till well after Independence.⁴⁷ If the struggle for freedom against the British was an all-pervasive emotional experience for all Indians living at the time, then the Partition of the country was a defining moment both in the life of the newly created nation as well as that of her citizens. It was therefore perhaps inevitable that 'the Gandhian whirlwind' would be followed by a literary preoccupation with Partition. And in this respect, at least (as already stated), the Indian novel in English has not had too different a history from that of the novel in the other languages of India. From Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) to Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (2000)⁴⁸, the Partition has been a recurrent theme in Indian English fiction, with a new perspective on the event emerging in each succeeding decade. This book will endeavour to reflect upon this development, just as it will try to show how from the 1950s to the 1980s the Partition, in the minds of writers, no longer remained just a cataclysmic event that needed to be recorded, but more a phenomenon to be explored and even theorized about as something that informed and defined the social, political, cultural and religious realities on the Indian subcontinent.

However, it is a fact that equally in history and in literature, both the documentation and the representation of the Partition are tilted to the Punjab side, in the sense that both historians and novelists appear to be

more concerned with and interested in the events that took place in Punjab in 1947.

It needs to be stressed, however, that the Partition experience actually turned out to be quite different on the Punjab and Bengal borders. The crisis in Punjab was seen as a national emergency, to be tackled on virtually a war footing. This obviously had a great deal to do with Punjab's strategic defense position on the western frontier of India, but there was also another crucial factor at play here. As the communal violence in the Punjab came close to being genocide, the government felt a moral responsibility in promptly initiating rehabilitation measures for the refugees. This sense of immediacy was totally lacking when it came to the eastern border. As the incidents of communal violence in the east were arguably less significant when compared to the sheer magnitude and scale of the violence in the west, Hindu minorities in East Bengal were not considered to be in grave danger, and the flight of these refugees westwards was regarded mostly as the product of imaginary fears and baseless rumours. In fact, well after it had begun, Nehru continued to believe that the exodus in the east could be halted and even reversed, provided the government in Dacca could be persuaded to deploy 'psychological measures' to restore confidence among the Hindu minorities.⁴⁹ This difference in attitude and perception of the central government in India regarding the nature of the crisis existent on the two borders translated itself into a striking difference in its *per capita* expenditure on refugees in the west and the east – a difference that would have permanent and debilitating consequences for the economy of Bengal.⁵⁰

Interestingly enough, even when one leaves aside the province of politics and administration and considers the question of literature, a similar difference can be seen. As far as Partition literature in the subcontinent is concerned, both Punjab and Bengal produced a substantial body of work in the languages of the respective provinces. But unfortunately, they have not been equally available. As vernacular literatures within India engage with each other to a great extent through the medium of English, English translations of Partition stories and novels are of paramount importance in making these works available. Translation work in this area certainly took some time to start in India, but when it did (especially at the time of the Golden Jubilee celebration of Independence in 1997), it was mostly from Hindi and Urdu to English, while Bangla Partition novels and short stories were largely neglected.⁵¹ And not only this, for even when it comes to the Indian novel in English, one can discern a similar slant towards the Partition experience in the Punjab. Inevitably then, this book reflects this Punjab bias as well, for five out of the six novels considered herein deal with the Partition on the Punjab border. The situation in Bengal is merely mentioned in

some of them. In fact, while Rushdie admittedly deals at length with the Bangladesh War of Independence (in Book III of *Midnight's Children*), an event which can be regarded as the second Partition⁵² of the subcontinent, it is only Amitav Ghosh who in *The Shadow Lines* focuses exclusively on the aftermath of the 1947 Partition on the Bengal border.

The six novels studied in this book

The first novel that will be discussed is Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, which shows how Mano Majra, a sleepy little village on the frontier between India and Pakistan, suddenly wakes up to unprecedented violence and horror on the eve of the Partition. Sikhs and Muslims, who had for generations lived peaceably together as 'brothers', can no longer trust each other after they are made to burn a train-load of dead Sikhs, and Muslims are threatened with retaliation. The violence that erupted during the Partition has been frequently highlighted in fiction, but nowhere with a more naked power than in *Train to Pakistan*. Stark in style and matter-of-fact in tone, Khushwant Singh's narrative is impersonal to the point of being cold and, yet, is immensely gripping.

As the first Partition novel to be published in English (in 1956), it has come to attain an iconic status.⁵³ Critics across five decades unanimously agree on the power and popularity of the novel, however much they may differ in their opinions as to its literary quality. The most significant aspect of the novel is that, though its author deals with the carnage in the Punjab in 1947 with pitiless realism, unlike other bhasa writers of the time, he is not completely taken up with just the violence, for he also redeems a sense of faith in essential humanity at the end of the novel through the figure of Jugga. Indeed, it must have been very difficult to take such a stance at the time the novel was written, a difficulty that is borne out by the fact that very few of his contemporaries were able to do this. In fact, the greatness of the novel lies in this ability of Singh to rise above parochialism, and not so much for the realistic depiction of those times for which he has been universally praised.

The Maharashtrian author Manohar Malgonkar's novel, *A Bend in the Ganges*, shares with Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* a preoccupation with political events, but it otherwise stands as a study in contrast. These two novels, which are examined in Chapter I ('Partition: The Holocaust') of this book, have some common aspects, but their literary fates could not have been more different. Though he is far more competent as a novelist, Malgonkar's Partition novel has never enjoyed the kind of popularity that Khushwant Singh's novel has, but this has not stopped Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* from being extensively studied by critics. It is perhaps ironic that this should be so, because

racy and packed with events as it is, Malgonkar's novel has all the ingredients of a bestseller. But the novelist's real aim here is not to excite but to provoke thoughts on the 'whys' of Partition and Independence.

Central to *A Bend in the Ganges* are two fundamental questions that Malgonkar explores at great length – first, whether Hindus and Muslims could really ever be united; and second, whether non-violence could be a plausible and practical way of life. The answers to these questions are presented through Malgonkar's depiction of the two heroes in the novel, Devi Dayal and Gian Talwar, who represent the opposing political ideologies of revolutionary terrorism and non-violence, respectively. With great élan, Malgonkar shows how the initial clash between Indian Nationalism and British Imperialism gave way to communalism in the last phase of the British rule in India, when friends and neighbours became enemies virtually overnight, and Gandhi's 'non-violent' India suddenly seemed to delight and indulge in an orgy of violence. Yet, *A Bend in the Ganges* is not a novel about the violence that erupted at the time of the Partition. It is far more an examination of violence taken up as a creed. The orgy of violence that exploded during the Partition was basically a drama of revenge. But what Malgonkar explores in *A Bend in the Ganges* is the philosophy of violence as propounded by the terrorist movement, where violence was used not as an instrument of revenge but employed as a political strategy by a subject nation to achieve a positive political goal. The novelist thus explores two kinds of violence in the course of the novel, the violence of revolutionary terrorism and that of communal violence, and shows how the one mutated into the other during the period of the Second World War in India.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* finds a place in this work by virtue of its being arguably the most important and the most representative of the Partition novels written by a Pakistani author.⁵⁴ This novel happens to be Sidhwa's most popular novel, the work she is most readily identified with, aided in no small measure by the success of the film version which was titled *1947: Earth* and directed by the diasporic Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta, who introduced it to a wider audience globally.⁵⁵ The novel is about an eight-year-old Parsee girl, Lenny, whose world falls apart when her beloved Ayah (who is a Hindu) is abducted, never to come back in her life again. In the most crucial incident in the book, Lenny, trusting the Ice-Candy-Man, betrays Ayah's hiding place – and the residual guilt of this betrayal never leaves her. This is the one incident that changes her life forever.

The violence with which Singh's and Malgonkar's novels are so pre-occupied features in *Ice-Candy-Man* too, but here, it has a very different appeal. In this novel we see everything through the eyes of Lenny, who, though sharp and inquisitive, is after all only a spectator, living in the

midst of, but apart from, the rising tensions among the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs of Lahore in 1947. The narrative of *Ice-Candy-Man* is also different from that of Singh's and Malgonkar's in that it is a woman-centric one, with its focus on Lenny's Hindu Ayah, her abduction, and later recovery and rehabilitation (which is possible only with the intervention and sustained efforts of other sympathetic women). The novel, thus, basically shows how the Partition and its trauma affected women – both those who were victimized by its violence and those who fought on their behalf.

Interestingly, the novel's focus on women parallels a development in Indian historiography, because it was not until the 1980s that women found a proper representation in the Partition history. In fact, the most seminal books written on the subject of women and the Partition were actually published only in the 1990s⁵⁶, and so, in a way, *Ice-Candy-Man* may be said to have anticipated them. Additionally, *Ice-Candy-Man* also parallels a development in Urdu literature, namely its representation of rape. Instead of concentrating on the act of violation itself, the novel focuses on its aftermath, the trauma of the victim, and the way she tries to cope with it and come out of it.⁵⁷

In Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, which along with *Ice-Candy-Man* forms Chapter 2 ('Women during the Partition: Victim and agent') of this book, the Partition is the backdrop to an emotional crisis that a pair of siblings faces in their relationships and the ensuing change in their personal equations. Political history is inextricably bound up with personal history in this novel as the Partition changes the very profile of the family and forces the siblings of the story – Bim, Raja and Tara – to make emotional and intellectual adjustments in their lives. One of the most celebrated novels of Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day* also marks a transitional point in her career. Like most of her earlier novels, the alienation of the protagonist is a central concern here, too, but unlike them, it does not lead to the annihilation of the self at the end, but to its rejuvenation and reidentification with the milieu. Desai's novels have generally more to do with private selves than public lives – but in *Clear Light of Day*, the two merge and mesh. Also, though this novel has not been critiqued sufficiently from its Partition angle, a close examination of the text reveals that far from it having only a tenuous link with the Partition, the event is actually crucial to both its plot and characterization. It may be said indeed that the uniqueness of this novel lies in the fact that it shows how the Partition affected even the lives of those who were neither (even remotely) involved with nationalist politics, nor (and perhaps more significantly) were the victims of exile or displacement after the Partition. The characters themselves suffer no loss – albeit physical – of life and property at the time of the Partition. There is no dislocation in their lives, only disruption, for Raja's shifting

to Hyderabad is voluntary – propelled by desire and not compulsion. Finally, it will be an argument of this study that the novel also highlights the ‘liberatory potential’ of the Partition, at least as far as women are concerned. Being mainly about a woman (Bim) who is not a refugee or a victim of Partition violence, but a victim of familial pressures and obligations, the novel shows how she finally comes into her own in the summer of 1947 after being abandoned by her family.

Chapter 3 (‘The making of a nation: Religion or language?’) of this book deals with Salman Rushdie’s magnum opus *Midnight’s Children*, which changed the history of Indian writing in English forever. The first novel by an Indian to win a Booker Prize⁵⁸, it has enjoyed a phenomenal success both in India and abroad right from the time it was published in 1981, its cult status being attested repeatedly when it won the ‘Booker of Bookers’ (adjudged to be the best book to have won the prize in the first 25 years of its history) in 1993; and again, the prize for the best Booker of 40 years in 2008. There are two protagonists in *Midnight’s Children* – Saleem Sinai and independent India, both born at the midnight hour of August 15, 1947. Together, in this phantasmagoric saga, nation and child go through the pangs of birth, the tantrums of childhood, the traumas of adolescence, and the anomie of adulthood. And the novel portrays how Saleem’s personal story becomes interlinked with the three partitioned States of India, Pakistan and (later) Bangladesh.

The novel has spawned a most prodigious amount of critical commentary in the almost three decades of its famed existence. It has been celebrated as the quintessential postmodern text⁵⁹ for Rushdie’s use of ‘magic realism’, and much else. But strangely enough, Rushdie’s very unique representation of the Partition in the novel seems to have somehow missed the attention of the critics. In fact, it may be said that there are three aspects about the treatment of the Partition in *Midnight’s Children* that sharply differentiate it from the other novels discussed so far. The first is that it is the only novel that takes within its ambit both the Partition of 1947, which divided the subcontinent into a secular India and an Islamic Pakistan, as well as the later division of the two wings of Islamic Pakistan into two separate nations, Pakistan and Bangladesh, in 1971. The novel’s second unique aspect is that unlike the other Partition novels mentioned so far, its characters inhabit all three partitioned states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. And finally, the novel stands out in the special way in which it represents the precise moment of the Partition. Indeed, *Midnight’s Children’s* depiction of the Partition is not only interesting and unique, but also extremely significant as it raises some of the most profound questions about Indian politics regarding the issues of nationalism and secularism, the politics of religion and language, and the failures of 1947.

Completely different from *Midnight's Children* is Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, a novel that shows the far-reaching consequences of the Partition, even two generations after the event. Ghosh focuses here on the absurdity of the Partition and its ability to unleash endless ripples of violence through a crucial incident in 1964 when the protagonist's uncle, Tridib, falls victim to a rioting mob's fury in Dhaka. The novel won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1988, and its popularity with readers and critics alike has never abated since⁶⁰; and it has also been on college and university courses syllabi across the world.

The analysis of Ghosh's text in Chapter 4 ('Imagined communities: Questioning the border') reveals that it is not as much about the Partition *per se* as the idea of a nation, and about the concept of the narrative of the nation. In one way, its concern is more with historiography than history. In fact, it dramatizes what Milan Kundera says in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, that 'the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting'.⁶¹ In his own novel, Ghosh pits the memory of communal riots in the subcontinent against the documented history of its wars. He also examines the nature of the relationship between the modern nation state and its citizens, and exposes the limits of that relationship. Equally, as this study will attempt to show, *The Shadow Lines* is the only novel not only to deal exclusively with the aftermath of the Partition, but also with the Partition on the Bengal border. In this context, it is important to note that Ghosh happens to be the only major Indian-English novelist who is preoccupied with the Bengal Partition, vis-à-vis the exilic movements that it led to. Three of his novels (*The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines* and *The Hungry Tide*) address, in varying degree, the aftermath of the 1947 Partition in Bengal, and look at the continual refugee problem that it led to, thus highlighting one of the most vexed and long-standing unresolved issues of post-Independence/Partition subcontinental politics.

Novels not selected for study

The six novels discussed above have been selected for study because they are not only landmarks (in many cases) in the history of Indian-English fiction, but more importantly also represent distinct trends as far as the Partition theme is concerned.

There are actually quite a few others which are taken up with the Indian Nationalist/Gandhian movement of the early decades of the twentieth century; and some of them even lead up to the Partition and its immediate social aftermath. The most celebrated among them are *Kanthalpura* by Raja Rao (1938)⁶²; *Waiting for the Mahatma* by R.K. Narayan (1956)⁶³; *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hossain (1951)⁶⁴; *Inqui-*

lab by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas (1955)⁶⁵; *Some Inner Fury* by Kamala Markandaya (1956)⁶⁶; *A Time to be Happy* by Nayantara Sahgal (1957)⁶⁷; *Azadi* by Chaman Nahal (1975)⁶⁸; and *Looking Through Glass* by Mukul Kesavan (1995).⁶⁹

But it needs to be noted here that though all these novels collectively can be said to deal with the Indian nationalist movement in general, each of them actually focuses on a particular landmark on the road to freedom. They are, variously, the Non-Cooperation movement (1920); the Civil Disobedience movement (1930); the 'Quit India' movement (1942, one of the most popular of the mass movements launched by Gandhi – a fact that is reflected in quite a few novels); and finally, Independence, Partition (1947) and its immediate consequences.

This study, on the other hand, has chosen novels that are more focused on the Partition, engage with it in direct ways and offer fresh perspectives on the event and its meanings.

Filling up a lacuna

The Partition is a historical legacy handed down unwanted to the children of the three nations India, Pakistan and later Bangladesh. The memories of the pain suffered in those times, of the splits that fractured and refractured the subcontinent, the remembrance of the scale and the intensity of the human suffering that the Partition caused, are the stuff that fill the pages of the novels studied in this book. Yet, as the following analyses of the selected Partition novels will attempt to indicate, individually, each novelist's treatment of the Partition is different from the others', even as over time they collectively plot a curve of development as far as attitude and perspective are concerned. It is this particular aspect – i.e. tracing the evolution of the Partition theme in Indian-English fiction over a period of three decades – which may be a valuable contribution of this book to its field. It is important here to take a brief look at the existing body of criticism on the Indian-English novel.

The novel happens to be the most successful genre in Indian-English literature. And ever since its study was instituted in universities all over India, there has been no dearth of criticism on this genre. But they mostly fall into two categories – they are either author-based monographs that study the works of any one novelist (often very early in their careers); or, more frequently, they are anthologies of essays on Indian-English fiction as a whole. At any given period of time, it is the latter that outweighs any other form of criticism on Indian-English literature. An interesting feature of these anthologies is that they are usually focused on recent publications. Thus, an anthology edited by R.K. Dha-

wan in 1982 is titled *Explorations in Modern Indo-English Fiction*⁷⁰; and another edited by R.S. Pathak a whole decade later, *Recent Indian Fiction* (1994).⁷¹ Even when the focus is narrowed to a particular theme, the emphasis is still on the contemporary. Two such recent examples would be P.S. Ravi's *Modern Indian Fiction: History, Politics and Individual in the Novels of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh & Upamanyu Chatterjee*⁷² and M.K. Bhatnagar's *Modern Indian English Novel: A Critical Study of the Political Motif*, both published in 2003.⁷³ Makarand Paranjape has very perceptively analyzed this trend in Indian-English criticism thus:

As we approach the end of this century, nay millennium, there seems to be an acceleration of time, a sort of telescoping of history. We seem to be overtaken by the present, deluged by the now, swallowed up by the contemporary (...). So far as IE fiction is concerned, this has resulted in the peculiar highlighting of the latest over all the rest. In an essay called 'Myths and Misconceptions about IE Literature', I have labelled this phenomenon as the fallacy that the latest is the best. This idea, at least partly, stems from the world of consumer goods in which the latest usually is the best because it is technologically more advanced. Similar notions of technological advancement inform the discourse which considers the newest literary sensation as signalling a new masterpiece. Of course, such an ideology ends up supporting the market forces which, increasingly, regard a novel as a consumer product, not an artistic one. The promoting, packaging, and marketing of culture, then, is merely a subset of the larger phenomenon of consumerism.⁷⁴ (2000: 122)

Not surprisingly, then, Paranjape himself is one of the very few Indian critics not only to have studied the genre of the Indian-English novel as a whole, but to have undertaken no less a task than articulating a poetics of the genre in *Towards a Poetics of the Indian English Novel* (2000).⁷⁵

Before him, Meenakshi Mukherjee was the first to specifically study the themes and techniques of the Indian-English novel over a substantial period of time in her seminal work, *The Twice-born Fiction: A Study of the Themes and Techniques of Indian Novels in English 1930-1964*.⁷⁶ Yet the only work to undertake a detailed study of the critical discourse of the Indian-English novel is by a foreigner. Dieter Riemenschneider's *The Indian Novel in English: Its Critical Discourse 1934-2004* (2005)⁷⁷ is an important contribution to an academic field where, till now, regrettably, quantity has always overwhelmed quality.

Even when we leave aside the genre of the Indian-English novel as a whole and come to the specific theme of 'the Partition' – which has de-

veloped into a kind of subgenre over six decades – we will notice the same critical tendencies discussed above. Thus, though all the authors dealt with in this book are both very well known and have been thoroughly researched, their Partition novels are seldom placed in a tradition of Partition literature – they are, once again, either part of single-author studies (which place them in the author's overall *oeuvre*) or else part of anthologies where miscellaneous essays are strung together on the common theme of the Partition. Recent examples of the former would be Pramod Kumar Singh's *The Novels of Khushwant Singh: A Critical Evaluation* (2005)⁷⁸ and Anshuman Mondal's *Amitav Ghosh, 2007*.⁷⁹ Two very recent anthologies on Partition literature to which I have myself contributed are Narinder Neb and Tejinder Kaur (eds.) *Perspectives on the Partition Fiction of the Subcontinent* (2006)⁸⁰ and R.K. Dhawan and Neena Arora (eds.) *Partition and Indian Literature, Vol. 2* (2010).⁸¹ Partition is currently a favourite topic with Indian scholars, a fact reflected by the addition of two more titles on the subject in 2008, N. S. Gundur's *Partition and Indian English Fiction*⁸² and Dr. D.R. More's *The Novels on the Indian Partition*.⁸³

Novelists and the question of theme aside, when we come to the six specific texts that are discussed in this book, it is useful to remember that, apart from being penned by well-known writers, they are also very popular themselves; and in fact, in four (*Train to Pakistan*, *Ice-Candy-Man*, *Midnight's Children*, and *The Shadow Lines*) out of the six cases, they happen to be their authors' best-known works. Consequently, they not only regularly turn up as pieces for anthologies, but sometimes have entire critical books devoted to them. The most well-known among the latter are *Rushdie's Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings* (1999) edited by Meenakshi Mukherjee⁸⁴, *The Shadow Lines: Educational Edition* (2002)⁸⁵, and *Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man: A Reader's Companion* (2004) edited by Rashmi Gaur.⁸⁶ Yet, none of the above categories of critical books, single-author studies, anthologies on the theme of the Partition, or exclusive anthologies devoted to certain texts, deal with the evolution of the Partition theme itself. This book hopes to fill this lacuna.

1 Partition: The Holocaust

Iconic status of *Train to Pakistan*

‘Khuswant Singh’s searing novel *Mano Majra (Train to Pakistan)*, New York, 1956), first made me aware of the human impact of Partition’s tragedy on Punjab’ (2006: ix). This is Stanley Wolpert’s first statement of ‘Acknowledgements’ in *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India*.¹ Wolpert, one of the most reputed historians of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, acknowledges this intellectual debt in 2006, exactly fifty years after *Train to Pakistan* was first published; and his comment, in a way, sums up the stature of Singh’s novel as a Partition text.

*Train to Pakistan*² was the first English novel to be written on the theme of Partition, and it also happened to be Khushwant Singh’s first book. Singh himself was trained as a lawyer and practised in Lahore High Court till the Partition took him away from his beloved city and landed him, like hundreds and thousands of other Sikhs and Hindus at the time, in Delhi. In the six decades since then, he has donned many hats – that of diplomat, eminent journalist/columnist³, reputed historian⁴, distinguished publishing editor⁵, and one of India’s most respected (and controversial) public figures.

All through this long career in writing and publishing, Khushwant Singh wrote several novels, especially *Train to Pakistan* (1956), *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959)⁶, *Delhi* (1983)⁷, *In the Company of Women* (1999)⁸, and most recently, *Burial at Sea* (2004).⁹ Among these, *Train to Pakistan* remains the best and also the most well-known Partition novel in English to date. No other novel that came after it (and there have been many), however famous or brilliant, has been able to supplant it in popularity. And even when it comes to commentators and critics, it has had a phenomenal track record. In this respect, it is interesting to note that even novelists who have themselves written on the subject of the Partition have praised it highly. Salman Rushdie for instance praised it as ‘the only good book on the theme [of Partition]’¹⁰, while Amitav Ghosh has acknowledged it as ‘a classic’.¹¹ Critics of the

Indian-English novel, from K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar¹² and Meenakshi Mukherjee¹³ to William Walsh¹⁴ and Paul Brians¹⁵, have also felt it necessary to devote a great deal of critical space and attention to *Train to Pakistan*. This already existing copious criticism notwithstanding, *Train to Pakistan* cannot be ignored in any study that attempts to explore the development of the Partition theme in the Indian-English novel. Hence it will be the first novel to be examined in this book.

Train to Pakistan is a vignette – the depiction of a sleepy little village called Mano Majra, situated on the declared border between the still-to-be-formed nations of India and Pakistan, suddenly waking to unprecedented violence and horror on the eve of the Partition. The action covers only a few weeks and deals mainly with the predicament of a quite innocent and completely unpolitical people caught up in the whirlwind of the Partition. It is noticeable that there is a certain symmetry to the action depicted in that both at the beginning and end of the novel there are identical situations: a trainload of dead bodies (all of them Sikhs) comes from Pakistan at the beginning, and it is decided that a trainload of dead (all of them Muslims) should go over to Pakistan at the end. Only, in the latter case, this is prevented at the last minute by the cunning of one man and the sacrifice of another.

In his autobiography, *Truth, Love & a Little Malice: An Autobiography*¹⁶, Khushwant Singh recounts that while he was practising law in Lahore, he became part of a literary circle, and that he used his ‘visits to Sikh villages from where [his] clients came as backgrounds for [his] stories’ (2002: 102)¹⁷. He also recalls how, on the eve of the Partition, he had narrowly missed being murdered on his way to Lahore from Abbotabad via Taxila, and how the day after he reached Lahore, he had ‘(...) learnt from the papers that the train by which [he] had travelled had been held up at the signal near Taxila station and all the Sikh passengers in it dragged out and murdered’ (2002: 108)¹⁸.

Two things clearly emerge from these reminiscences: first, that by 1956, Khushwant Singh had already written fiction that used the village as a backdrop; and second, that he had himself (even if he had not actually faced violence) known of many instances of train-related killings on the Punjab border on the eve of the Partition. It needs to be noted too that as an amateur historian, Singh could not but have been conscious of the momentous age of Indian history that he had lived through. This must have prompted him to write fiction, for he probably found fiction to be a better medium than history to reflect on contemporary realities. However, his instincts as a historian, together with his own experiences at the time of the Partition, combined with his budding skills as a fiction writer, all came together to produce *Train to Pakistan*. The novel itself (entitled *Mano Majra* in the American edition) was first published in 1956, within a decade of India’s Independence. As K.R. Srinivasa

Iyengar remarks: 'It could not have been an easy novel to write. The events, so recent, so terrible in their utter savagery and meaninglessness, must have defied assimilation in terms of art' (1962; 1996: 502)¹⁹.

Yet, whatever may have been the specific difficulties, aesthetic or otherwise, faced by the novelist, it is undeniable that Singh succeeded in writing a novel of abiding popularity. One of the most distinctive aspects of the novel is its preoccupation with political events. 'Events' in themselves occupy an important place in this novel, even to the exclusion of such features as psychological insight, probably because the author lived too near to the events he describes. This is the case, in fact, with not only *Train to Pakistan* but also Manohar Malkgonkar's Partition novel *A Bend in the Ganges*. First published in 1956 and 1964, respectively, these two works of fiction can almost be taken as direct political and social documents of the Partition. Yet they are radically different not only in their focus, but also in their selection of events and in their styles of narration, as will become clear in the later section of this chapter, which will consider Malgonkar's novel.

Symbolic significance of trains

Before moving on to an analysis of Singh's novel and its depiction of events, it is important to pause and reflect on the symbolic significance of trains with regard to the Partition in general and Partition literature in particular. Trains happen to be one of the most enduring images of the Partition of the subcontinent. An image of overloaded trains, with people pasted on to every possible part of its body – clinging on to the windows, perched precariously on footboards, hanging between the buffers, crowding on the roofs – is what immediately comes to mind while thinking of the Partition. It is an image that has been permanently imprinted on the nation's collective imagination; and has become, over the decades, a convenient shorthand to refer to the Partition. To give a ready example of this, it may be pointed out that as many as three books relating to the Partition published within the last decade in India have, on their front covers, pictures of such trains.²⁰

When it comes to the representation of trains in written texts or literature, Khushwant Singh's novel is definitely not the only one that deals with this theme or has a train as one of its motifs. Quite a few celebrated Hindi and Urdu short stories, for example, revolve around this too, and mention may be made of Bhisham Sahni's 'We have arrived in Amritsar', Krishan Chander's 'Peshawar Express' and Amrit Rai's 'Kichar'.²¹ All these stories use the train as a trope to conceptualize the fragility of life, and to articulate the idea of the uncertainty of

being able to reach one's destination. But each of them does this in its own distinctive way. In Bhisham Sahni's story, a Hindu weakling shifts from being in a perpetual state of terror while living in a Muslim majority area to a state of revengeful and homicidal arrogance in a Hindu majority area. Rather differently, Krishan Chander assigns the narrator's role to the Peshawar Express, traversing the blood and gore of the vast terrain of the north-western region. Passing from one warring territory to another, the train carries not just dead bodies, but horrific tales and rumours as well. Thus, the train acquires the status of a reporter, traveling far and wide to report on the violence stalking the country during the dark days of the Partition. On a different note, those sitting in the train compartment in Amrit Rai's story 'Kichar' are not uprooted refugees but well-heeled members of society, ensconced in their middle-class comforts. They talk about 'national' (Hindu-Muslim) and 'international' (India-Pakistan) issues with the same nonchalance as they talk about the hike in the food price at a local restaurant. The murders in East Punjab are reduced to statistics in their conversation, and pride is taken in the fact that the Partition has brought to the fore the militancy of the Hindus, who are now considered to be no more the punching bags of the 'eternally aggressive Muslims', since the ratio of killings is now reported to be 3:2. And to the men, the tales of violation of women are nothing more than pornography written on an epic scale. Rai's story thus records with anguish the patriarchal snobbery and vicariousness underlying all narrations of abduction, rape and other forms of violation against women.

In striking contrast, in *Train to Pakistan* the violence that erupted at the time of the Partition is represented in a very unusual way. There is no detailed description in the novel of the train journey undertaken by the refugees – in terms of neither the practical difficulties faced nor the dangers involved. More importantly, we are also not shown the violence happening; for there is not even a reported description of the incidents in the novel. We are just informed about the end result of the violence: the trainloads of corpses that arrive at Mano Majra. What is detailed by Khushwant Singh is the aftermath of the violence, that is, how the trainloads of the dead are successively disposed of; how it changes everything in the village; and how another similar event is prevented from happening. The train, in fact, has a completely different symbolic value in Singh's text inasmuch as it represents an otherwise insulated village's tenuous link with the outside world. Most importantly, the trains running to and from Mano Majra are shown to regulate the life of the village and its inhabitants. Thus, the disruption in the railway schedule after the Partition functions in the novel as a sign of social chaos, as the following passage makes clear:

Early in September the time schedule in Mano Majra started going wrong. Trains became less punctual than ever before and many more started to run through at night. Some days it seemed as though the alarm clock had been set for the wrong hour. On others, it was as if no one had remembered to wind it. Imam Baksh waited for Meet Singh to make the first start. Meet Singh waited for the mullah's call to prayer before getting up. People stayed in bed late without realizing that times had changed and the mail train might not run through at all. Children did not know when to be hungry, and clamoured for food all the time. In the evenings, everyone was indoors before sunset and in bed before the express came by – if it did come by. Goods trains had stopped running altogether, so there was no lullaby to lull them to sleep. Instead, ghost trains went past at odd hours between midnight and dawn, disturbing the dreams of Mano Majra.²² (Singh 1956; 1988: 91-92)

This is just the prelude to the nightmare that the villagers of Mano Majra have to undergo in the next few weeks in the wake of the Partition. There is a succession of violent and unprecedented events that follow each other rapidly in the summer of 1947, leaving the villagers totally helpless and disoriented. Bhai Meet Singh, the priest of the Gurudwara, very aptly sums up what the villagers go through towards the end of the novel. Updating Iqbal (a communist agent just released from jail) on the recent events in Mano Majra, the Bhai tells him:

What has been happening? Ask me what has not been happening. Trainloads of dead people came to Mano Majra. We burned one lot and buried another. The river was flooded with corpses. Muslims were evacuated, and in their place, refugees have come from Pakistan. (pp. 191-192)

These words are of crucial significance as they detail the five key 'events' around which the narrative of *Train to Pakistan* is woven.

The five events of the narrative

Of all these 'events', it is the third event, that is, the eviction of the Muslims from their own village, that is accorded a place of primacy in the narrative. Certainly, it is the most poignant part of the whole book. It is pathetic the way Chacha Imam Baksh comes to the Sikh assembly and asks their verdict on the sudden decision of the local administration to evacuate the Muslim villagers of Mano Majra in the faint hope

that they will ask him and his fellow Muslims to stay. He is reassured, only to be disappointed, for everybody understands the purport of the lambardar's words when he says:

Yes, you are our brothers. As far as we are concerned, you and your children and your grandchildren can live here as long as you like... But Chacha, we are so few and the strangers coming from Pakistan are coming in thousands. Who will be responsible for what they do? (p. 147)

The Chacha accepts his fate, though with a heavy heart, but his daughter Nooran simply refuses to leave the place of her birth. She is fierce in her assertion of her rights as opposed to the emotional outburst of her father in the Sikh gathering. Chacha tells her that if she does not leave by herself, then she will be 'thrown out'. And in fact, that is exactly what happens to the Muslims in Mano Majra, for they are 'thrown out' by their fellow villagers.

By themselves and as a community, the villagers are naïve and ignorant people with very little political awareness and with even less knowledge of what was happening in India at the time. Independence and the Partition had not affected their lives till then, just as the struggle for freedom had made no difference in their day-to-day affairs. They could not even understand what the fuss about Independence was all about. As the lambardar asks a startled Iqbal (who, after having caused a good deal of confusion in the village as to his religious identity²³, was trying – unsuccessfully – to share communist thoughts with the elders of the village):

Freedom must be a good thing. But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes? ²⁴ [And then goes on to reply himself] No... Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians – or the Pakistanis. (p. 62)

When such a community of people who seem to have no dealings with the political life of the nation whatsoever are suddenly thrust into the vortex of a political cataclysm, it is but natural that it would not register on them at first. As Singh shows in the novel, it is through the medium of the refugees that the people of Mano Majra first come to know of the violence just outside the confines of their little world, a violence that was spilling over and now spreading into the heart of their own village. But they were ignorant of the extent of the savagery that was now rampant all across the western and eastern borders of India (the areas

where the migrations took place, where there were whole-scale exchanges of population). That they were ignorant even after having burnt a trainload of corpses is because of the fact that though they were shocked and stunned by such a happening, they had taken it to be an exception and could not believe it to be the rule. That is why the Sikh officer's merciless, sarcastic words at the time of the Muslim evacuation come as a blow to the villagers. When Meet Singh expresses his discomfort with the idea of being entrusted with the custody of the evacuated Muslim villagers' property, saying that it might later lead to misunderstandings between friends, the Sikh officer replies,

You are quite right, Bhajji, there is some danger of being misunderstood. One should never touch another's property; one should never look at another's woman. One should just let others take one's goods and sleep with one's sisters. The only way people like you will understand anything is by being sent over to Pakistan; have your sisters and mothers raped in front of you, have your clothes taken off, and be sent back with a kick and spit on your behinds. (pp. 157-8)

This is actually a blow that is even worse than the evacuation of the Muslims. At least the evacuation was for something good, the villagers of Mano Majra thought – their friends and neighbours reaching safety; while what the Sikh officer was talking of was a scenario devoid of all sanity and humanity. Gradually, the novel records the progressive darkening of their vision as they are stripped, one by one, of all their illusions. And nowhere does this transpire better than in the actual act of the evacuation of the Muslim inhabitants of Mano Majra.

To begin with, the Muslims of the village of Mano Majra thought they were going to the neighbouring Chandannagar camp only for a few days, locking their houses and leaving their cattle under the care of the Sikhs. But soon they learn that though they will be staying at the Chandannagar camp for a few days, afterwards they will have to proceed to Pakistan. The truth now strikes them that they have been moved to go to Pakistan, and not (as they had earlier thought) to halt and then come back to Mano Majra once the storm has blown over. But an even greater shock awaits them, and this is the realization that they cannot take their belongings with them, and that they can only take what they can carry in their hands. What is more, they are forced to leave everything not under the care of their fellow villagers, as they had thought, but in the custody of Malli (a dacoit of the neighbouring village) and his gang and a few refugees, and everybody knew what these people would do with their belongings. Still, a pretension is kept up by the police that their goods will be returned to them in due course, and so, a mock list is

made of the items left behind. Both the Muslim and Sikh officers involved in this operation know, of course, that the Muslims are going to Pakistan forever (if they do not get killed on the way, that is); and that nothing will remain of their belongings, which will either be looted or destroyed.

Hence in a matter of hours, the world of the Muslims in *Mano Majra* falls apart forever. They are stripped of all their hopes, begin to realize that they are about to lose everything, and yet are powerless to do anything about this. It is unique the way this ironic building up of loss is dramatized in the novel, showing the utter helplessness of ordinary people overwhelmed by historical forces that are simply beyond their control, or even their comprehension.

But the most poignant part of the entire episode is of course the farewell, or rather the lack of it. As the narrator says:

There was no time to make arrangements. There was no time even to say good-bye. Truck engines were started. Pathan soldiers rounded up the Muslims, drove them back to the carts for a brief minute or two, and then on to the trucks. In the confusion of the rain, mud and soldiers herding the peasants about with the muzzles of their sten guns sticking in their backs, the villagers saw little of each other. All they could do was to shout their last farewells from the trucks... The Sikhs watched them till they were out of sight. They wiped the tears off their faces and turned back to their homes with heavy hearts. (p. 159)

The chapter in which this happens is not only a very crucial one in the novel, but also a representative one, for what is shown as happening here was actually happening all around in the Punjab and Bengal in 1947. As Iyengar perceptively comments: 'What is recorded with such particularity was but a speck in the dust-whirl that was the Partition' (1988: 501)²⁵. This episode, in fact, effectively dramatizes what the narrator himself records on the very first page of the novel:

Hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the Northwest Frontier abandoned their homes and fled toward the protection of the predominantly Sikh and Hindu communities in the east. They travelled on foot, in bullock carts, crammed into lorries, clinging to the sides and roofs of trains. Along the way – at fords, at crossroads, at railroad stations – they collided with panicky swarms of Muslims fleeing to safety in the west. The riots had become a rout. By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten million people – Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs –

were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding. (p. 9)

We find similar reflections in a number of other Partition novels as well. There are almost identical passages in, for example, Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*. But what is more important to note is that all such reflections highlight the fact that at the time of the Partition, most common people living on the borders suffered from the illusion that all the looting and killing was happening 'elsewhere', and that they themselves would remain unscathed or at least would be able to avoid it. Teckchand, in Malgonkar's novel, for instance, bitterly regrets not accepting his wife's advice of leaving Duriabad, their hometown, for the safety of the Hindu-majority Allahabad. At the end of the novel, he is stranded in his own house waiting for a convoy that never seems to start. He bitterly reflects: 'It was as simple as that, just two weeks ago. Get into a car and drive away' (Malgonkar 1964: 346). But now this has become impossible. And as the novel shows, the entire Teckchand family is wiped out (including the servants). Only the daughter, Sundari, survives, and Malgonkar leaves a faint ray of hope open that she will reach safety and start a new life with the novel's protagonist Gian, who turns up in Duriabad at a most crucial moment.

In *Ice-Candy-Man*, similarly, we are given a vivid account of the savagery that was perpetrated in hundreds of villages across the border. One particular episode in this novel stands out, and this is the depiction of an incident of Partition violence against Muslims that Sidhwa separately heads as 'Ranna's Story' (Sidhwa 1989: 195-208), and which was later included by Salman Rushdie in *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing in English*.²⁶ Yet, it should be noted here that the narration of these incidents sums up something far more significant than a mere retelling of similar stories. Actually, the impression created by all these episodes from the different novels is one of what Maulana Azad called the 'total insanity of the two-nation theory'.²⁷

Khushwant Singh further shows that even in villages where there were no animosities between the different communities even after hearing rumours, a division was forced upon them by the administration, from the fear that things might get out of hand otherwise. The lambar-dar, for instance, echoes the Magistrate Hukum Chand's earlier ominous warning: 'if something happens...', and warns his fellow villagers that the refugees who had arrived till then were a peaceful lot only because they had not lost any of their women folk, but that if this happened, it would be difficult to contain them. The villagers are thus placed in a peculiar predicament. They cannot refuse to shelter the in-

coming refugees, but they also cannot allow them to be violent towards their own fellow villagers who happen to be Muslims. To foment trouble, Hukum Chand concocts false charges against innocent people and tries to arouse false fears to provoke the Sikhs against the Muslims. He even draws up an elaborate plan to loosen the strong ties existent for generations between the two communities, so that the Sikhs would no longer try to stop their fellow Muslim villagers from leaving Mano Majra. Police enquiries are initiated about Jugga, Sultana and Iqbal, even though as the reactions of Meet Singh and the lambardar indicate, the villagers know very well that there is not a word of truth in the allegations made by the police, and that the facts are that Jugga would never murder anyone in his own village, that Sultana and his gang had left for Pakistan long ago, and that Iqbal was actually a shaven Sikh who had come to Mano Majra only after the murder of Ramdayal, the Hindu moneylender of the village. Yet, such is the power of rumour and such is the insidious role it plays that it changes everything overnight and provokes disharmony in the hitherto peaceful village.

As Khushwant Singh indicates, the refugees themselves play a kind of catalytic role in this respect, for it is through their presence in the village that the Sikhs become aware, for the first time, of the atrocities perpetrated against their community outside the confines of their own village. Therefore, though the Sikh villagers are initially hesitant about throwing out their Muslim brethren, they are later persuaded to do just that. The refugees succeed in inciting the weak-minded villagers against the Muslims²⁸; and they themselves eagerly join the notorious dacoit Malli in his looting and later the khaki-clad youth in his escapade to stop the train from going to Pakistan. It is also interesting to note that the refugees themselves remain an anonymous cluster of men who are neither named nor given individual stories. This is largely because in Khushwant Singh's scheme of things, the refugees serve a more functional purpose than to represent human interest material.

If the third major event depicted in *Train to Pakistan*, the evacuation of the Muslims precipitated by the presence of the refugees, is poignant, then the first and the last gruesome event, the trainloads of dead arriving at the beginning and end of the novel, lend an aura of eerie suspense to the narrative. These arrivals also serve another important function in that they mirror the sea change that takes place in the atmosphere of the village as in the attitude of its inhabitants. It is significant, too, that the narrator's tone is sympathetic in the description or evocation of the coming of the first batch of the trainload of corpses. The novelist clearly shows the shock and bewilderment of the villagers; shows how the rhythm of their lives is disrupted, disjointed and broken. They are totally taken aback by the happening and even forget their daily chores. It is as if life itself had come to a halt.

While depicting the destruction of a neighbouring village whose corpses fill up the Sutlej, Singh shows the same incredulity of the Mano Majrans as when they had burnt the first trainload of dead or evacuated their Muslim brothers. It is the fourth tragedy to strike them in a matter of weeks, and in all that time, they seem to be dealing only with the dead and the dying. But while depicting the response of the Mano Majrans to the second trainload of corpses – which they eventually bury, and which is the fifth and last in a series of horrific events that they face within a very short time – the narrator's tone changes. Previously, while registering the shock of the villagers to the arrival of a whole trainful of dead Sikhs from Pakistan at their station, the narrator had said: 'That evening, for the first time in the memory of Mano Majra, Imam Baksh's sonorous cry did not rise to the heavens to proclaim the glory of God' (pp. 100-101). In sharp contrast to this, while dealing with the second trainload of dead at the end of the novel, there is no expression of sympathetic engagement on the part of the narrator. Rather, there is only a scathing remark:

When they came back to the village, [i.e. the people who had gone to inspect the river, to see what was floating on it] nobody was about to hear what they had to say. They were all on the roof-tops looking at the station. After two days a train had drawn up at Mano Majra in the daytime. Since the engine faced eastward, it must have come from Pakistan. This time too the place was full of soldiers and policemen and the station had been cordoned off. The news of the corpses on the river was shouted from the housetops. People told each other about the mutilation of women and children. Nobody wanted to know who the dead people were, nor wanted to go to the river to find out. There was a new interest at the station, with promise of worse horrors than the last one. (p. 166)

From the feeling of 'This cannot happen to our village' to the thrill of more violence ('There was (...) promise of worse horrors than the last one') – this shocking change in the attitude of simple village folk within the span of only a few weeks speaks volumes about the hellish nature of those times when the moral order had collapsed, and no one could make any sense of the cataclysmic changes that were happening all around them.

Flaws/Jugga, and Singh's redeeming vision

The narrative of *Train to Pakistan* thus neatly divides itself up into the five events that have been discussed so far – viz. the evacuation of the Mano Majra Muslims; the burning and later burial of two trainloads of Muslim and Sikh corpses, respectively; the arrival of refugees from across the border; and the destruction of a neighbouring village. This excessive preoccupation with events is basically Singh's way of highlighting the terrible holocaust of the Partition. To maintain this focus, he uses a simple, straightforward narrative and even eschews such important aspects of fictional representation as the individualization of characters.

This becomes clear if we examine the figurative language used in the novel. It first appears to be in keeping with the backdrop of Mano Majra – homely images, and abundant metaphors and similes that smell of the soil. To cite a few examples:

'The head constable's visit had divided Mano Majra into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a pat of butter.' (Narrator – p. 41)

'... a snake can cast its slough but not its poison.' (Bhai to Iqbal – p. 55)

'Babuji, who kills a hen which lays eggs?' (Jugga to the police – p. 125)

'A wise man swims with the current and still gets across.' (Hukum Chand to the sub-inspector – p. 116)

However, a close examination will reveal that in all the above passages, the Bhai, the Magistrate and the *budmash* all speak in the same idiom. By the strictest standards of novelistic discourse, this would be deemed a flaw, but Singh's intention here is not the individualization of characters but the foregrounding of events. This foregrounding is indeed so important a part of the narrative technique that other aspects like the individualization of characters through speech is largely ignored. Thus, all the characters in the novel – good, bad, illiterate and educated – speak in the same idiom. It is almost as if Singh is determined that nothing should come in the way to detract the attention of the reader from the main storyline.

Some critics have taken serious exception to this attitude and technique of the author and criticized him for it. Suvir Kaul, in his 'Introduc-

tion' to the anthology, *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, says:

That a largely mediocre novel, thin in character and event, written in an idiom that must have seemed forced even in the 1950s (and which has certainly dated rapidly since), has achieved such prominence is surprising. This success is either a tribute to the novel's simplicity of conception and narrative.... or, more likely, follows from the fact that there was so little else written in English about the partition of 1947 that interested readers did not have much to choose from (...). Notwithstanding all its problems, the novel has found a large readership, which begs the question of what it is about the power of not very compelling writing (or indeed cinema) to keep us riveted, so long as the stories told are those of Partition? ²⁹(Kaul 2001: 18)

This is a pertinent observation, but the answer to Kaul's question lies in the fact that Singh has been able to offer his readers a redeeming vision; and that it is this that has held their attention for more than half a century after it was written. For Singh's vision, as it comes through in the major part of the story, is almost apocalyptic; and yet, it is not entirely dark. For most ironically in this novel, just when things seem irredeemably dark, a vision of redeeming humanity comes from a totally unexpected quarter, in the form of Jugga, the *budmash* whom no one could trust and whom no one thought capable of any positive emotion, action or deed. We, of course, have been told very early in the novel that Jugga indulges in antisocial activities only when there is no work in the fields and his hands itch for something to do. We also know that he has been wrongly accused of murder, because when Ramdayal, the village moneylender was killed, he was away in the fields making love to Nooran, the Imam's daughter. He is a rough and demanding lover, but also very protective of his beloved and so he frames a convincing excuse for her to give at home when she is afraid of getting caught and threatens never to meet him again. He gets angry at Bhola (the tonga-driver) for making sly remarks about his affair, and he almost kills Malli in prison for his innuendoes. He is garrulous, obscene and irritates Iqbal in prison with his endless talk about sex – but he never once mentions Nooran or discusses his relationship with her. She is almost sacred to him, and he knows her inside out. He has a gut feeling that she must have come to his mother before leaving Mano Majra – which in fact she has. And so blind is his love that even before knowing what has actually happened in his absence, he decides to teach his mother a lesson in the event of her not having treated Nooran properly.

Hukum Chand, the District magistrate, exploits this emotion of Jugga to the full. No sooner does he get wind of Jugga's affair with Nooran and his passion for her than he hatches a conspiracy to save the Muslims going to Pakistan. Jugga is merely a tool in this scheme. Hukum Chand is confident that if Jugga came to know that the villagers were planning to prevent the train (full of Muslim refugees from the Chandannagar camp) from going to Pakistan, he would do everything in his power to stop that, because his beloved Nooran would also be one of the passengers travelling in that train. So Jugga is suddenly released, to his great surprise, and the news of the Mano Majra Muslims being evacuated is repeatedly hammered into his head. Instantly, he becomes a changed man – sullen and quiet. He comes to know of the secret plan of the villagers, but he does not react verbally to it. The reader is told nothing about what he intends to do, but only provided with a hint that he is aware that he is about to do something solemn. Hence, he turns up at the gurudwara at an ungodly hour and requests the Bhai, 'I want the Guru's word. Will you read me a verse?' When Meet Singh asks what he wants to do, he impatiently says, 'It does not matter about that... just read me a few lines quickly' (198). Meet Singh reads out a piece from the morning prayer. After this, Jugga wishes him 'Sat Sri Akal' and takes his leave. The reader is still left ignorant of Jugga's motive, and it is only in the last three pages of the novel that he is let in on the secret of what Jugga has set out to do: defeat the clandestine mission of his fellow villagers. The suspense is kept up successfully till the end, and nothing quite prepares us for Jugga's sacrifice. Though we know from the very beginning that he loves Nooran, we never think him capable of such selflessness. In fact, just prior to the time the Magistrate hatches his conspiracy, the sub-inspector says that Jugga seems to be the type who is never swayed by emotion, and that probably he would not even grieve over Nooran's loss and soon find someone else. Jugga, however, proves everyone wrong.

Jugga's Nooran gets saved. So does Haseena, the prostitute Hukum Chand had unaccountably come to love. He realizes his feelings for her only after he comes to know that all the Mano Majra Muslims have been evacuated and have proceeded to the Chandannagar camp from where they would go to Pakistan in a matter of days. For some time, he toys with the idea of keeping her back, but then realizes that this is not possible. However, when he comes to know that the train that will carry her to Pakistan will be attacked, he goes mad. He just cannot allow that to happen, and he decides that if he cannot keep Haseena back, he will at least not let her die. He is in a desperate state, and it is in such a frame of mind that he conceives his conspiracy in which Jugga becomes the sacrificial pawn. Hukum Chand's plan succeeds, and both

Haseena and Nooran it is hoped are saved, since they are in the train carrying Muslim refugees to Pakistan.

Critics have interpreted the ending of the novel differently. M.K. Naik, for example, finds 'the conventionally romantic motif of the love of Jugga, the Sikh village gangster, for (of course) a Muslim girl, in saving whom he duly sacrifices his life' to be a 'flaw' in the novel; and impatient with the depiction of such inter-religious romances, asks: 'Why must Hindu heroes of Partition novels fall, with monotonous regularity, in love with Muslim girls alone?'³⁰

Suvir Kaul, on the other hand, is of the opinion that Jugga's sacrifice at the end is just not 'an act of individual heroism', because in addition to saving Muslim lives, it 'brings back order and humanity to a village swept away by the flood of fratricidal violence sweeping over the Punjab'. According to him, Singh seems to say that 'if the trains can be allowed to run as scheduled, much more than the lives of its passengers will have been saved.'³¹

Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*

The violence that erupted during the Partition has been frequently highlighted in Indian-English fiction, but perhaps nowhere with a more naked power than in *Train to Pakistan*. This perhaps explains why this novel is not just one of the most popular novels written on the Partition, but is also one of the best-known texts in the whole canon of Indian-English fiction. It is undeniable that compared to Khushwant Singh's popular novel, the attention that has been given to Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*³² is more or less confined to critical books dealing with Indian writing in English in general and the Partition in particular.

Certainly it is true that Malgonkar has not received the full measure of critical attention that he rightfully deserves as a significant Indian novelist in English. In fact, as A. Padmanabhan laments in the 'Introduction' to her book on Malgonkar,

Branded as an entertainer and storyteller, the deeper qualities of his fiction have been neglected or unperceived by many. There are only two full-length studies on his fiction by academic critics, namely, G.S. Amur and James Y. Dayananda. N.S. Pradhan takes up only one of the novels – *A Bend in the Ganges* – for a detailed analysis. H.M. Williams too does not make a sustained study of Malgonkar's fiction (...). The general tendency in the sixties and seventies was to dismiss him in a hasty pell-mell fashion. It is

only in the eighties and nineties that he slowly, though partially, emerged from neglect and underrating.³³ (2002: 2)

Among Malgonkar's own novels, however, *A Bend in the Ganges* happens to be the 'most-discussed' work³⁴, and an interesting thing about this novel is that it has all the ingredients to make a book popular. It is racy, packed with events, has frequent surprises and twists in the plot and a liberal dose of love and romance, not to mention its representation of an action-packed history. Yet the novel is no cheap-thrill best-seller, but actually a work of deep political introspection, and arguably one of the best novels that Malgonkar ever wrote.

Malgonkar's fascination with history

As far as the content of this novel is concerned, there is extensive political documentation in *A Bend in the Ganges* right from Gandhi's Non-Cooperation movement till the time of the Partition. But Malgonkar's aim in doing so is not to give an 'erratic national calendar' as Meenakshi Mukherjee³⁵ has somewhat erroneously observed, nor to provide the ingredients of a historical novel. Here he is rather concerned with the 'whys' of Partition. It may be pertinent to point out here that *A Bend in the Ganges* is not Malgonkar's only novel that deals with the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. In fact, the Partition and the riots before and after it figure prominently in two of his previous novels, *Distant Drum* and *The Princes*, as well. But the uniqueness of *A Bend in the Ganges* (as a Partition novel) lies in the fact that here he portrays the growth of communalism during the closing decades of British rule in India.

Partition apart, Malgonkar also wrote about the first Indian war of independence of 1857 in *The Devil's Wind*. Thus, he displays his great fascination for Indian history right from the Great Revolt to the post-independence era. This interest in politics has perhaps something to do with Malgonkar's professional life as a soldier. Malgonkar served in the British Indian Army from 1942 to 1952, when he travelled widely in Nepal, Indo-China, Malaya and Western Europe, including England. That this rich experience of his as a soldier in a whole decade of active service (which also happened to be a momentous time of world history) was a clear source of inspiration for his novels is evident from a statement that he made in an interview given to James Y. Dayananda: '(...) some aspects of politics and all that I have gone through – like our troubles with the English, for instance – I have experienced them myself. So, to that extent, it has given me some sort of capital to draw on.'³⁶

He undoubtedly drew on these experiences in writing *A Bend in the Ganges*, especially for his depiction of the Second World War, which is

one of the most prominent features of the novel. Malgonkar's aim in the novel is, however, not simply to faithfully depict a war that changed the world, but rather to investigate the various strands of the nationalist movement in India and try and fathom why it all went wrong at the end. Central to the novel are two fundamental questions that the author explores at great length: first, whether Hindus and Muslims could ever be really united; and second, whether non-violence could be a plausible and practical way of life. These questions are worked out, and the documentation of the times is embodied through the narrative strategy of the employment of double-heroes who represent two opposing political ideologies – revolutionary terrorism and non-violence, respectively. These protagonists are Debi Dayal, the committed revolutionary terrorist, and Gian Talwar, the professed follower of Gandhi (but who sways with every wind and unscrupulously uses other people for his own purposes) and they are both directly involved in political action. And it is through the contrasting responses of these two figures to the political upheaval of the times that the author seems to build up a debate as to which ideology was more suited for tackling the immense complexities of the freedom struggle, as also the anomalies that underlay the Hindu-Muslim question.

Double-hero/pluralistic method

Both features of *A Bend in the Ganges* mentioned above – i.e. the employment of double heroes; and through them, pitting two opposing political ideologies against each other – are new in this genre of fiction.

Commenting on the first, A. Padmanabhan says: Instead of the usual single protagonist of Malgonkar's earlier novels – Kiran Garud in *Distant Drum*, Henry Winton in *Combat of Shadows* and Abhay Raj in *The Princes* – in *A Bend in the Ganges*, there is the device of the double-hero, chosen from different social backgrounds.³⁷ (2002: 38) Indeed, apart from Malgonkar, no other English novelist of the Partition has used this device yet.

But the aspect which really distinguishes *A Bend in the Ganges* is that contrary to the monolithic approach of most novels dealing with India's freedom struggle, Malgonkar's novel shows 'a pluralistic method'³⁸ in the depiction of politics. Indeed, Malgonkar is perhaps the only novelist to give importance to the terrorist movement of the 1930s; and while he concedes that Gandhi won freedom for India, there is a thorough questioning in *A Bend in the Ganges* of the validity of 'ahimsa' or non-violence. This deviation in his depiction of the diverse strands in the nationalist struggle is Malgonkar's unique contribution to the genre of Partition fiction.

The Hindu-Muslim question

An interesting point about the thematic concerns of Malgonkar's novel is that they negate a cherished assumption of post-colonial theory, the notion that the post-colonial literature mostly has resistance to the ex-colonizer as their theme.³⁹ Malgonkar's novel, it will be seen, is manifestly more inward-looking than outwardly protest-oriented. Instead of hitting out against the British oppressors, it explores the socio-political dynamics of Indian society with special focus on the two contending communities, the Hindus and the Muslims. *A Bend in the Ganges* questions why the Partition happened in the first place and asks whether it is simply because of the *divide and rule* policy of the British, or whether there were also inherent (though invisible) fissures and fault lines in the very structure of Indian society that made the Partition possible.

In asking these issues, Malgonkar may indeed be seen as anticipating the stance of recent historians like Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose who suggest in their work, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, that:

There is now overwhelming evidence to suggest that regardless of whether Muslims were in fact a 'nation', let alone one created by British policies of divide and rule, it was the contradictions and structural peculiarities of Indian society and politics in late colonial India which eventually led to the creation of Pakistan.⁴⁰ (2004: 135)

In keeping with the trend of this opinion, the omniscient narrator of the novel reflects:

'Religious differences among the races of India were the root cause of the country's slavery, and the British had learnt to take the fullest advantage of these differences, playing the Hindus against the Muslims and the Sikhs against both.'⁴¹

The result was fundamentalism which was ironically growing in strength even as the nationalist movement gained momentum. Two episodes in the novel – one near the beginning and the other towards the end – effectively sum up the trajectory of the communal question in India in the three final decades before Independence.

The first of these episodes takes place in Chapter 8 of the novel, where we meet the terrorist group 'Freedom Fighters' (of which Debi is an active member) for the first time; and find Debi's leader, Shafi Usman, categorically declaring, 'The only saving grace of the Nationalist movement is gone, it is no longer united, no longer secular' (p. 78). As the novel shows, it was as early as in 1929 that Debi had begun to have misgivings. When all his boys eagerly volunteer for a new assignment,

the burning of a plane stranded in the military aerodrome in Duriabad, he feels a '(...) surge of pride (...) and for the first time that evening he wondered how long it could be maintained. (...) How long would it be before the flames of communal hatred caught up with them?' (p. 86).

Malgonkar indicates as well that Shafi Usman did have his reasons for feeling this way. Towards the end of the 1920s, a new rift had been created between the Hindus and the Muslims in India following the Congress and the League's final parting of ways after the publication of the Nehru report in 1928.⁴² In the novel, Shafi's leader, Hafiz, is shown writing to him from Bombay complaining about the callousness of the Hindus towards the Muslims, suggesting that they should reorientate their activities.

But Shafi does not see eye to eye with Hafiz, and he makes this clear to Hafiz when the latter comes down to Duriabad to talk to him after a few days. In Chapter 10 ('Two leaders') of the novel, Shafi and Hafiz argue their case with pointed logic and much evidence to support their respective views. We are not told who wins, for the argument is shown to remain inconclusive when Hafiz leaves late that night, but not before he bequeaths to Shafi a few journals and newspapers to be perused carefully and makes an appeal that he should outgrow his Jallianwala days. (Shafi lost his parents at the Jallianwalabagh Massacre in Amritsar in 1919, and in youthful rebelliousness joined the terrorist movement soon after, believing it to be the best way to free the country).

The morning after Hafiz leaves, Shafi warns a few of his boys about a possible raid of the Hanuman Club (as the police inspector who informed him had told him not to warn all his boys, because then he might be suspected) and escapes himself. But as the novelist clarifies, it was only while he was travelling in the train that he realizes that he had warned only the Muslim boys, 'It was the sort of coincidence that worried Shafi for a long time, but even to himself, he refused to admit that it had anything to do with the visit of Hafiz, or with the clippings he had left behind him' (p. 100).

In Chapter 30, ('Founder Members'), we find Debi meeting Bose, his former terrorist friend, in Calcutta in 1945, after he leaves Assam. They had last met in 1939 without the slightest inkling that six very eventful and momentous years would elapse before they would set eyes on each other again. The world was no longer the same again after the Second World War; and India, in particular, was on the brink of another cataclysmic event. But these intervening six years did not have the same impact on the two men. Debi had been in exile for the entire span of the Second World War and hence had been in a way unaware of things at home. Bose now briefs him on the real political situation in India in the last six years: the widening (and now, almost unbridgeable) gulf between the Hindus and Muslims of the subcontinent; the Partition Plan;

the growing stature of fundamentalist parties like the Hindu Mahasabha (of which he was now a proud member); and the rumours rife everywhere that the two communities were just waiting to pounce on each other once the British left India.

Debi is all ears but unconvinced of Bose's arguments. His fierce belief in terrorism as the only possible path to real freedom had already begun to be replaced by a new respect for Gandhi and the philosophy he stood for, and hence a new confusion as to what should be the right course of action begins to brew in his mind. It would not be wrong to guess that Debi's mind had not been vitiated by communal thoughts because he has been away. Had he been in the midst of all this mutual hatred, suspicion and mistrust, he too would have been swayed to Bose's side. Bose trying to show him the real picture in this chapter is just like Hafiz trying to show Shafi the truth earlier in Chapter 10. Debi had not known the Second World War experience in India at first hand; Shafi (according to Hafiz) had not outgrown his Jallianwalabagh days.

Malgonkar's representation of these two episodes indicates his ideas about the progressive deterioration of the communal situation in India in the phase between 1919 and 1945, from the Hindu-Muslim communities merely harbouring suspicion about each other to being avowed enemies, waiting to exterminate each other.⁴³ Such feelings, he implies, were the root cause underlying the event of the Partition, and as he shows it in his novel, the worst part was that nobody could remain unaffected by it. As the narrator says:

Every citizen was caught up in the Holocaust. No one could remain aloof; no one could be trusted to be impartial (...) The administration, the police, even the armed forces⁴⁴, were caught up in the blaze of hatred. Willy-nilly everyone had come to be a participant in what was, in effect, a civil war (...) a war fought in every village and town and city where the two communities came upon each other. (p. 341)

At the end of the novel, in Chapter 34 ('The Anatomy of Partition'), we find Debi Dayal's father, Teckchand, the richest and most renowned man in Duriabad, bitter and raging at the turn of events:

That it should have come to this! (...) After a lifetime spent in this part of India, in this town, and giving oneself to it and taking from it; letting one's root sink deeper and deeper (...) This is my city, as much as that of its most respected Muslim families (...) I, my family, have done as much as any of them to make it prosperous and beautiful (...). And suddenly someone has decided that this land which is mine should be foreign territory

– just like that! And merely because some hooligans take it into their heads to drive all the Hindus away from their land, I have to leave everything and go, pulled out by the roots, abandoning everything that has become a part of me. (pp. 347-348)

Revolutionary terrorism vs. non-violence

Malgonkar's delineation of the so-called 'Hindu-Muslim question' in *A Bend in the Ganges* is both sensitive and thought-provoking. But the most arresting feature of the novel lies elsewhere. As already stated, one of the most ironic aspects of the Indian anticolonial struggle against the British was that fundamentalism grew even as the nationalist movement gained momentum in the years before Independence. It is this parallel development that Malgonkar traces with much dexterity in the novel. And he does this by his in-depth analysis (through his double-heroes) of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the opposing ideologies of revolutionary terrorism and non-violence.

As virtually all historians of the Indian freedom struggle agree, the organized struggle for independence, properly speaking, began with the Gandhian era in Indian history.⁴⁵ Malgonkar's narrative, interestingly, also starts roughly at the end of the 1920s, beginning with the Civil Disobedience Movement of the early 1930s and ending with the post-Partition riots in the Punjab. Between these two poles all the excitement of two decades are packed in the novel: the boycott of foreign goods; the secret activities of terrorist groups; the outbreak of the Second World War; the Japanese occupation of the Andamans; the British retreat from Rangoon; the long march of evacuees from Burma⁴⁶; the Bombay dock explosion⁴⁷; the dismemberment of India. These political events in fact shape the plot of the novel. Malgonkar shows his protagonists as directly involved in each of the events enumerated above, in some way or the other. Their lives are driven by these stupendous happenings which just carry them along.⁴⁸

Quite early in the novel, we find both Debi and Gian being convicted (though for different reasons) and deported to the Andamans by the British. Yet their lives follow a very different trajectory after they reach the island. While Gian is a favourite with the officials in the Cellular Jail, Debi becomes the hero of the convicts because of his pride and uncompromising attitude even in the face of torture. When the Japanese occupy the Andamans (Chapter 23, 'Brothers from Japan'), he becomes the spokesperson of the convicts and deals with the Japanese colonel Yamaki on their behalf. Yamaki inducts him into the Japanese Indian army (most of which was comprised of prisoners of war), and he lands in Rangoon soon after. However, following the British evacuation there,

he lands in Assam and gets a job as an assistant stockman of the Silent Hill tea garden. At the end of the war and after a period of intense restlessness, he leaves Assam and comes down to Calcutta to meet his former terrorist friend Bose. Gian, on the other hand, had never been concerned about the fate of his country. He just wanted to settle down to a quiet family life in the Andamans. That does not happen; and at the time of the Japanese occupation, he escapes from the island and reaches Madras, and with the help of a calculated strategy lands a job in Bombay.

Thus, as Malgonkar shows it, both the protagonists live through the same historical events differently. As Malgonkar has drawn them, Debi Dayal is a committed revolutionary while Gian (somewhat uneasily) accepts Gandhi's philosophy. Through them, Malgonkar focuses on certain key issues that lay at the heart of the ideological clash between Gandhi's satyagrahis and the revolutionary terrorists of the day. The doctrine of non-violence and all that it stands for is very eloquently summed up in the words Nehru is made to speak in the very first chapter of the novel ('A Ceremony of Purification') where Gian attends a meeting where Gandhi and Nehru had come:

We are all soldiers. Soldiers in the army of liberation. (...) But we are a new kind of soldier. Our weapons are truth and non-violence. Our war shall be fought only by peaceful means. Gandhiji has shown us the path. But make no mistake; our violence is the non-violence of the brave, arising not from cowardice but from courage, demanding greater sacrifices than ordinary fighting men are called upon to make. (p.12)

In the course of this speech, Nehru at least acknowledges that the terrorists are also patriots – albeit of a different kind – even though he makes it clear that they have no place in the 'army of liberation' headed by the Congress. But the terrorists, as represented in the novel by Shafi Usman, Debi's leader and mentor, are deeply contemptuous of Gandhi and his followers and condemn them outright. At the end of Chapter 2, ('The Green Flash at Sunset'), Shafi, frustrated that he could not induct the shy village boy and Debi's college mate, Gian (who professes to be a Gandhian) into their terrorist organization, says: 'College boys fall more easily for Gandhi's type of movement, it is much more face-saving. They shelter their cowardice behind the tenets of non-violence, and refuse to rouse themselves to any form of positive action' (p.24).

If we are to gauge the strength of the two movements through the characters who represent them in the novel, then revolutionary terrorism wins; at least, initially. Debi Dayal comes across as a true hero, since he is totally dedicated to his cause, has faith in his convictions,

and is uncompromising. Gian, on the other hand, is shown to falter. And that he is himself aware of this is shown in Chapter 14 ('Beyond the Black Water'), where he ruminates:

Was it his youth that made him so shallow, he wondered, or was it a part of the Indian character itself? Did he in some way represent the average Indian, mixed-up, shallow and weak? (...) Why could he not be like Debi-Dayal, who held on to his beliefs with unswerving rigidity? (p. 134)

Interestingly, Gian's assessment of himself is the same as Debi's opinion of him as expressed in Chapter 16 ('The View from Debi's Cell') of the novel – 'He [Gian] was typical of the youth of India, vacillating, always seeking new anchors, new directions, devoid of any basic convictions' (p. 161).

Yet it would be unfair to condemn Gian in such unequivocal terms. True, he was convicted of murder after he declared himself to be a follower of Gandhi, but we know that he was not very sure about his actual response to non-violence, and given what happened in his family, he perhaps could not help doing what he did. In Gian's family, a long-standing family feud centering on a 100-acre plot of land named Piploda was brought to an abrupt end by Gian when he killed his uncle Vishnu-Dutt to revenge his brother Hari's death at the hands of the latter which he had been unable to prevent. The feud had started in Gian's grandfather Dada's lifetime and continued for three generations, claiming several lives in the process. It was Dada's part of the family that was worst hit – having suffered both injustice and fraud at the hands of his brother's family. The incident of the murder happened just days after Gian's uneasy embrace of ahimsa when he had come home for a holiday.

Gian's case is, however, not an isolated one. As Sudhir Kakkar, the biographer of Gandhi's disciple, Mira Behn, has pointed out, even those who adopted the creed of the Mahatma took some time to absorb the tenets of their leader. Even the most faithful of Gandhi's followers went through a few trials before becoming practising satyagrahis.⁴⁹ In the novel, Gian's act of violence is understandable in this context, as the time-gap between Gian's embracing non-violence and his homecoming was not a long one. In this novel, Malgonkar very effectively shows man's natural propensity to violence and what it is capable of once it is unleashed. In this context, it may be remembered that Shafi's strange prophesy at the beginning of the novel that 'a million shall die, a million' turns out to be true, but Gian's promise that he shall never indulge in violence is not kept.

However, as far as the novel is concerned, more than Gian not being able to keep his word, what is important to notice is that even Debi vacillates as the war progresses, and continues vacillating more often and doubting more deeply as the years pass by. The entire Second World War experience leaves him profoundly shaken and disillusioned. He watched the war from very close quarters, and in a way even participated in it. But then he came back to his own country only to see things totally changed, their cause of an armed struggle against the British defeated, and their beloved motherland not just on the verge of Independence but also on the brink of dismemberment and a civil war. As Malgonkar paints him, Debi is totally disillusioned, and only after this comes a new understanding and respect for Gandhi and his philosophy. For the first time in his life, he finds that he cannot dismiss the Indian National Congress and non-violence straightaway.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that the novel's plot shows Debi's views changing with the changing fate of the British in the War. At the very outset, when Mulligan (the superintendent of the Cellular Jail in the Andamans) was eager that no news of German victories should reach the convicts, Debi had told Mulligan to his face that he would never write an anti-British slogan out of sympathy for the Germans because the Germans were as bad as the English. But when the Japanese occupy the Andamans, they prove to be far worse than the British – because, besides their atrocities, seeing them dispense 'the justice of victors', the British seem kind by contrast. Yet again, in Debi's eyes, the British fare worst of all, in the way they withdraw from Rangoon. As the author comments in Chapter 27 ('Chalo Delhi!') of the novel:

No power that had occupied another country had ever disgraced itself so thoroughly as did the British in their withdrawal from Burma, Debi-dayal kept telling himself (...). The British Government there, its mask of respectability and self-righteousness torn away by a shattering military defeat, had been exposed as an ugly spectre, making the starkest distinction between brown and white (...) what had happened to the book of rules? To the haughty awareness of the white man's burden? – Debi Dayal asked himself. The veneer of centuries of civilization seemed to have been flung to one side. Women or children, old or infirm, it had made no difference. The essential qualification for being evacuated was white skin.⁵⁰ (p. 273)

It is at this point in the story that Debi realizes that there is no choice between two conquerors, for they can clearly outdo each other in iniquity. Back in India, he is shown to have become restless again, a re-

lapse into restlessness that had never quite left him ever since his Andaman days. Repeatedly, he feels, he could do something now. Now that the British had suffered major reverses in the Second World War, the time seemed right to strike back. This, in Debi's perception of things, was something that the Congress did not seem to understand. We cannot help feeling here that Debi, as portrayed in the novel, suffers from an exaggerated sense of self-importance. He apparently thinks that his presence or absence can make a real difference to the Indian political situation, when the brutal reality was that even his organization, the 'Freedom Fighters', did not exist any more, having broken up a long time ago, with its Hindu and Muslim members divided and even the Hindu members scattered. There was therefore no question of Debi being able to do anything in his erstwhile capacity of a revolutionary. Debi frets and fumes, but he never thinks of it this way. Though we may be impatient with him because of this, the author is being true to type. Revolutionaries in India fighting for the liberation of the country were proud of their devotion to the motherland and were convinced that they could make a difference by following the path of violence.

Their patriotism and passionate devotion to their cause find eloquent expression in the famous poem 'Sarfaroshi ki Tamanna' by the Urdu poet Bismil Azimabadi⁵¹:

*Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamaare dil mein hai.
Dekhna hai zor kitna baazuay qatil mein hai.*

*Hai liye hathiyyaar dushman taak mein baitha udhar,
Aur hum taiyyaar hain seena liye apna idhar.
Khoon se khelenge holi agar vatan muskhil mein hai,
Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamaare dil mein hai.*

*Haath jin mein ho junoon katt te nahi talvaar se,
Sar jo uth jaate hain voh jhukte nahi lalkaar se.
Aur bhadkega jo shola-sa humaare dil mein hai,
Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamaare dil mein hai.*

*Hum to ghar se nikle hi the baandhkar sar pe qafan,
Chaahatein liin bhar liye lo bhar chale hain ye qadam.
Zindagi to apni mehmaan maut ki mehfil mein hai,
Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamaare dil mein hai.*

*Dil mein tuufaanon ki toli aur nason mein inquilaab,
Hosh dushman ke udaa denge humein roko na aaj.
Duur reh paaye jo humse dam kahaan manzil mein hai,*

*Sarfāroshi ki tamanna ab hamaare dil mein hai.
Dekhna hai zor kitna baazuay qaatil mein hai.*

An English transition of the poem would be:

To lay down our lives is now our deepest desire.
We dare to challenge the enemy.

Weapons in hand, the enemy awaits on the other side,
And we are ready to face them on this side,
We shall play Holi with our blood if our country is in danger,
To lay down our lives is now our deepest desire.

The hand that is passionate cannot be cut by a sword,
Heads that are raised do not bow down on hearing the battle cry,
And the fire that shall burn is in our hearts,
To lay down our lives is now our deepest desire.

Heads wrapped in a shroud, we have left our homes,
Wearing our hearts on our sleeves, we move ahead,
Life is just a guest at death's door,
To lay down our lives is now our deepest desire.

A storm in our hearts and revolution running through our veins,
We will blow the enemy away, do not stop us today,
Our goal cannot avoid us today,
To lay down our lives is our deepest desire.
We dare to challenge the enemy.

These words could easily have been Debi Dayal's in *A Bend in the Ganges*. Indeed, he is truly a representative of the bunch of young revolutionary terrorists who made a mark on India's political scene in the early decades of the twentieth century. Like many of them, he comes from a privileged background, has to suffer dislocation as well as physical torture at the hands of the British, and dies young. The only difference is that while they were usually hanged in British jails, he ends up being a victim of Partition violence – killed by the very compatriots for whose freedom he had fought.

But before that, he suffers the greatest agony of all: doubting the very revolutionary ideology he was baptized in. As Malgonkar shows, Debi is not only restless when he returns to India after six years, but is also clearly confused. He does not know what is right or wrong, and feels the need to talk it out with someone. Thus (as has been mentioned earlier in this chapter), Debi goes and meets his old comrade Bose in Cal-

cutta; and Bose, to some extent, clears the cobwebs from his mind and also gives him a fresh perspective on things. He informs Debi that after his wife's face got scarred by an acid bulb thrown by a Muslim hooligan in a riot, he felt the need to join the Hindu Mahasabha and had come to believe that:

We have to become aligned in sheer self-defence. Hindus against Muslims. (...) [because] What had been aimed against the British, has turned against itself. And the ugliest thing it has bred is distrust. No Hindu can trust a Muslim any more, and no Muslim trusts a Hindu. (p. 298)

Debi is nostalgic for the days when the members of the Hanuman Club used to sit together and partake of beef and pork, meat taboo for Hindus and Muslims, respectively, to symbolize unity. He shrinks at the thought of a civil war and quite surprisingly (for a man of his inclinations) remarks: 'It almost makes one think that non-violence is perhaps the only answer' (p. 299). But Bose springs to the offensive. He holds forth eloquently on the pitfalls of the non-violent philosophy and its inherent limitations, in particular:

What is the future for a country nurtured on non-violence in a world of mounting violence? Tell me that. How are we to survive? – defend our borders? Can a non-violent nation have a violent army? – a navy? We will be sitting ducks for anyone who chooses to pick a quarrel with us; Burma, Ceylon, this new country, Pakistan. If non-violence is the bedrock of our national policy, how is the fighting spirit to manifest itself only in our services? (p. 300)

The inefficacy of non-violence as an all-embracing philosophy of life (which is the basis of Bose's argument) had become quite apparent by 1946. Very few Indians seemed to set store by it any more.⁵²

In the next chapter, Chapter 31 ('To fold a leaf'), we find Shafi Usman thinking just the obverse of what Bose had said in the previous chapter. For Shafi, the Ram-Rahim club, the partaking of a beef-and-pork dish, belonged to an uneasy past. He had now become convinced that there was no possibility of the

Hindus and Muslims living together (...). That was what the trial spell of provincial government had demonstrated. For the Muslims, independence was worth nothing unless it also ensured freedom from the domination of the Hindus. They would never

live in an India where they were only a tolerated minority. (p. 303)

Incidentally, this idea of Shafi's – the innate fear of the Muslims that the British Raj would inevitably be succeeded by a Hindu Raj which would only spell doom for them – is echoed in many other books. Towards the end of Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*, for example, this comes out very well in a conversation between two old friends, Sardarji and Rai Alam Khan (both very eminent and well-placed in their own ways). When Sardarji tries to allay what he thinks are his friend's fears about the imminent dismemberment of India, by saying, 'There are other ideas and options than partition... Federations, tiered governments, shared power,' his friend testily replies, 'Huh! Shared power! Partition will come; it is the only solution. Do you think we Muslims want to live under the Hindus or the Sikhs again?' (2000: 371).

Somewhat similarly in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*, just prior to the Partition, Ayah's circle have a heated argument at the wrestler's restaurant in Lahore about the creation of Pakistan (to which Lenny, the eight-year-old Parsee protagonist of the novel, is a witness). When the Government House gardener (a Hindu) tries to rationalize: 'It is the English's mischief (...). They are past masters at intrigue. It suits them to have us all fight,' the butcher (who is a Muslim) interjects:

Just the English? (...). Haven't the Hindus connived with the An-grez to ignore the Muslim League, and support a party that didn't win a single seat in the Punjab? It's just the kind of thing we fear. They manipulate one or two Muslims against the interests of the larger community. And now they have manipulated Master Tara Singh and his bleating herd of Sikhs. (1989: 92)

The Hindus, in other words, are not to be trusted.

In *A Bend in the Ganges*, however, Malgonkar shows the insecurity of both the Hindus and the Muslims. As A. Padmanabhan has rightly pointed out,

Thus, the Hanuman club becomes a microcosm of the macrocosm that was Indian society, with the Hindus and Muslims united at first to fight against the British, and, at last when they were about to leave, fighting against each other, with Bose representing the Hindus, Shafi the Muslims, and Debi an embarrassed observer in between.⁵³ (2002: 110)

Bose and Shafi, once revolutionary terrorists, are thus transformed right on the verge of freedom into Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists, re-

spectively. The author gives each of them the scope to present their case, as it were. But since they are both directly involved in political action, they are incapable of giving a detached, objective view. Rather, it is from Teckchand that we get the truly objective stance. When he ruminates at the end of the novel (while waiting for a convoy to start), we get the view of someone who perceives the whole issue rationally. Being unashamedly pro-British and safely distanced from the whole movement, he can truly see the thing for what it is:

The freedom they had longed for was only a day away; a freedom that would bring only misery to millions of them. The entire land was being spattered by the blood of its citizens, blistered and disfigured by the fires of religious hatred; its roads were glutted with enough dead bodies to satisfy the ghouls of a major war (...). Teckchand had never imagined that such happenings could be possible in India, after more than a hundred years of the sanity and orderliness of British rule, after thirty years or so of the Mahatma's non-violence (...). Now he could see that as far as the people of India were concerned, Gandhi's message was only a political expedient, that for the bulk of them, it had no deeper significance. At best, they had accepted it as an effective weapon against British power. It seemed the moment the grip of British power was loosened, the population of the subcontinent had discarded non-violence overnight and were now spending themselves on orgies of violence which seemed to fulfil some basic urge. (p. 342)

The failure of both ideologies

A Bend in the Ganges records the transformation of Revolutionary Terrorism into Fundamentalism and shows how a historic non-violent struggle against an imperial power ironically gave way to unprecedented communal violence and savagery. Debi at one point asks Bose a very pertinent question: 'Do you think the Congress movement has been just as much of a failure as ours?' to which Bose replies, 'It is an even greater failure' (p. 300).

Perhaps it was so. Revolutionary terrorism as a whole had a very short life and was easily terminated by the British. One of the reasons that it could not survive, according to the historian Bipan Chandra, was because, 'above all theirs was not the politics of a mass movement (...) they could not establish contact with the masses' (1999: 259)⁵⁴. But the most profoundly ironic and tragic turning came with Gandhi's non-vio-

lent movement, which, after having enjoyed decades of success as a mass movement, suddenly seemed to turn on its head.

Just three days prior to Independence (and his own death at the hands of Muslims) – on 12 August 1947 – Debi ruminated,

Would terrorism have won freedom at a cheaper price and somehow still kept the Hindus and Muslims together? Perhaps not. But at least it would have been an honest sacrifice, honest and manly – not something that had sneaked upon them in the garb of non-violence. (p. 366)

This is a very poignant statement, and one gets the feeling that like Debi, the author felt the same.

What indeed comes across most forcefully in a careful reading of *A Bend in the Ganges* is the author's preoccupation with the 'whys' of the Partition. As an amateur historian, Malgonkar was less interested in the specific happening that was the Partition than in examining the ideational fault lines that lay concealed under the event. The novel thus delineates with insight, penetration and utter analytic precision the uneasy transformation of a colonized country into a sovereign state, the difficult passage from the familiar shackles of bondage to the disturbing challenges of freedom.

As has been already stated, *A Bend in the Ganges* is not the first historical novel that Malgonkar wrote. His ability to handle his historical subjects with consummate skill had been proved first with *The Princes* and then again with *The Devil's Wind*. In these novels, he not only successfully blended the perception of the historian with the imagination of the novelist, but also achieved a documentary authenticity that is virtually unparalleled in the whole genre of Indian-English fiction. His achievement in *A Bend in the Ganges*, however, lies in another direction. In this novel, as Shankar Bhattacharya rightly points out, Malgonkar 'successfully combined narrative and analysis in a manner in which analysis does not interrupt or violate the texture of the narrative, nor does the narrative overwhelm analysis'⁵⁵ (1994: 153). It is perhaps this technical skill of Malgonkar as a novelist that his contemporaries, the novelists Khushwant Singh and R.K. Narayan, had in mind when they praised him later.⁵⁶

2 Women during the Partition: Victim and agent

Four of the six novels studied here were written in the 1980s. But there is a marked difference between them in that the novels written by women (Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*) stand apart from the others. They are as equally distinct from the two novels written in the 1960s by Khushwant Singh (*Train to Pakistan*) and Manohar Malgonkar (*A Bend in the Ganges*) as they are from the two other novels written in the 1980s by Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children*) and Amitav Ghosh (*The Shadow Lines*). Even a cursory reading reveals that the novels by Desai and Sidhwa present an alternative version to the male visualization of the event of the Partition. To put it simply, in their respective novels, Malgonkar gives us a thesis and Singh tells us a story. But both works betray signs of being totally preoccupied with the immediate political and social ramifications of the 'event' of the Partition. The ideological differences that gave rise to the political upheaval are discussed at length by Malgonkar; the plight of innocent people caught in the vortex of an unprecedented whirlpool of violence is shown by Singh. Yet, both novelists emphasize what the Partition meant in immediate and everyday terms. How much more intensely personal and intimate a technique of rendition there can be, we realise when we come to examine Anita Desai's and Bapsi Sidhwa's novels.

As the analyses of Singh's and Malgonkar's novels in the previous chapter tried to make clear, in the envisioning of these two novelists at least, the Indian people were living out the 'two-nation theory' whether they accepted the theory or not. Both novels show lives being ruptured, changed beyond recognition and shattered beyond all hope as a result of this theory working its way through the mindset of communally inclined people; dividing whole village communities as well as city folk into neat groups of 'them' and 'us', and most viciously spreading intolerance and violence in its wake. The Pakistani author Bapsi Sidhwa's third novel *Ice-Candy-Man*¹ (1989) shares this aspect of its narrative (that of innocent people living out a theory they knew nothing about) along with Malgonkar and Singh's novels; but otherwise, it defines a very different Partition experience altogether. Written from the Pakistani point of view and through the eyes of a Parsee child, Lenny, the novel deals with the eight-year-old Lenny's predicament in Lahore at the time of the Parti-

tion of the Indian subcontinent. She and her Hindu Ayah or nurse (who is later abducted) are the focus of the narrative, which basically shows how the Partition and its continuing trauma affected women.

The Pakistani version of the partition

All the specific issues referred to in the previous paragraph – viz. the Pakistani point of view, the Parsee angle, the child narrator and the focus on women's experience – contribute to the uniqueness of Sidhwa's novel. But each issue requires detailed consideration. Apart from being a novel which Salman Rushdie praised for embodying 'one of the finest responses to the horror of the division of the subcontinent'², *Ice-Candy-Man* presents an alternative perspective on the Partition. As Laurel Graeber in his *New York Times* review of the book wrote, 'Bapsi Sidhwa has attempted to give a Pakistani perspective to the Partition of India'³. This was an opinion that had already been previously stated by the author herself in an interview with David Montenegro in 1989, in the course of which she clearly stated:

The main motivation grew out of my reading of a good deal of literature on the partition of India and Pakistan (...) what has been written by the British and Indians. Naturally they reflect their bias. And they have, I felt after I'd researched the book, been unfair to the Pakistanis. As a writer, as a human being, one just does not tolerate injustice. I felt whatever little I could do to correct an injustice I would like to do. I have just let facts speak for themselves, and through my research I found out what the facts were.⁴

She felt that her status as a Parsee (that is, neither Hindu nor Muslim) would help her to do justice to the history of the Partition. As she herself once said, 'The struggle was between the Hindus and the Muslims, and as a Parsee, I felt I could give a dispassionate account of this huge, momentous struggle (...) as a Parsee, I can see things objectively'.⁵

Her stance is undoubtedly different from that of her Indian counterparts, and nowhere more radically so than in her portrayal of the 'chief players' of the Partition – the triumverate of Jinnah, Gandhi and Nehru. To counter what she claimed to be the British and Indian versions of the Partition, Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy-Man* not only tries to resurrect the image of Jinnah but also seeks to demystify the images of Gandhi and Nehru. Jinnah in the novel is highlighted as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity. And to substantiate this image of Jinnah, Sidhwa quotes the Indian poetess Sarojini Naidu:

(...) the calm hauteur of his accustomed reserve masks, for those who know him, a naïve and eager humanity, an intuition quick and tender as a woman's, a humour gay and winning as a child's – pre-eminently rational and practical, discreet and dispassionate in his estimate and acceptance of life, the obvious sanity and serenity of his worldly wisdom effectually disguise a shy and splendid idealism which is of the very essence of the man.⁶ (Sidhwa 1989: 161)

As against this paean in Jinnah's name, the sublime image of Gandhi constructed by British and Indian historians is totally undercut when he is seen through the eyes of the eight-year-old narrator, Lenny:

(...) Mother hauls me up some steps and into Gandhiji's presence. He is knitting. Sitting cross-legged on the marble floor of a palatial veranda, he is surrounded by women. He is small, dark, shriveled, old. He looks just like Hari, our gardener, except he has a disgruntled, disgusted and irritable look, and no one'd dare pull off his dhoti. He wears only the loin-cloth and his black and thin torso is naked. (p. 86)

Unlike most of the Indian historians who credit Gandhi for single-handedly ousting the British from India, in *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sidhwa reduces him to the role of an eccentric diet-faddist, who advises every woman to flush her system with enemas. According to the character called Masseur in the novel, Gandhi is only 'a politician' (not 'Bapu' or 'Mahatma') and 'It's his business to suit his tongue to the moment' (p. 91). Similarly, Nehru is described as just a shrewd politician who, in spite of all the efforts of Jinnah, 'will walk off with the lion's share' (p. 131). The politically conscious Ice-candy man calls him 'a sly one (...) He's got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English's wife out of his other what-not (...). He's the one to watch!' (p. 131)

In the light of the above citations from the text, it would perhaps not be wrong to say that Sidhwa succeeds in 'providing an alternate version of history'⁷ but not an objective one. Her not being a part of any of the contending communities does not automatically make her dispassionate and detached, as she would like us to believe. Indeed, the novel shows that she has merely replaced one bias by another. And this bias is manifest not only in the way she portrays the contemporary political leaders of the subcontinent, but is also evident in her depiction of Partition violence, where her sympathies are totally on the Muslim side.

The Partition in Bapsi Sidhwa's novels

Before discussing Sidhwa's depiction of Partition violence, it is necessary to point out the importance of the Partition in her fiction as a whole. As Niaz Zaman has rightly pointed out, three of the novelist's four novels – *The Crow Eaters*, *The Pakistani Bride* and *Ice-Candy-Man* '(...) are firmly rooted in a historical-political consciousness and concern directly or indirectly, the Partition of the Indian subcontinent and the creation of the newly-independent states of India and Pakistan' (2004: 98)⁸. Sidhwa's first novel (and her personal favourite)⁹ *The Crow Eaters* ends just before the Partition, with Faredoon Junglewalla, the protagonist, passing judgement, in his inimitable fashion, on the bickering politicians who are going to cut up the country. *The Pakistani Bride* (Sidhwa's first written novel, though published after the success of *The Crow Eaters*) begins some years before the Partition, and the earlier part of the novel describes the communal tension during the Partition, a train massacre, and the displacement consequent upon Partition. This novel is about a young girl, a Muslim refugee from India, who is adopted by a Pathan during the Partition upheavals. *Ice-Candy-Man*, tighter in focus than the other two novels, is concerned wholly with the turbulent events of the Partition as they affect the lives of a Parsee family and the people who come into their lives.

Nilufer Bharucha reads this development in Sidhwa's novels as essentially an exploration of the Parsee ethnic identity and its eventual assimilation in the larger milieu. According to Bharucha, with each succeeding novel of Sidhwa, the assertion of the theme of Parsee identity gradually wanes, and the Partition theme gets correspondingly stronger as the characters become integrated into their environment and overcome their anxieties as a social and political minority in the nation of their domicile. Thus, while the Junglewallahs in *The Crow Eaters* are indifferent to the political fate of the country, the Sethis in *Ice-Candy-Man* become actively involved in it, in however personal a capacity.¹⁰ Yet it must be remembered that one of the chief reasons why the Partition figures so prominently in Sidhwa's fiction is because it was one of the defining moments of her own childhood in Lahore. She herself has said on the record:

I was a child then. Yet the ominous roar of distant mobs was a constant of my awareness, alerting me, even at age seven, to a palpable sense of the evil that was taking place in various parts of Lahore. The glow of fires beneath the press of smoke, which bloodied the horizon in a perpetual sunset, wrenched at my heart. For many of us, the departure of the British and the

longed-for Independence of the subcontinent were overshadowed by the ferocity of Partition.¹¹

She successfully captures this ‘ferocity of Partition’ through the eyes of Lenny in *Ice-Candy-Man*. But it is important to remember too that unlike *Train to Pakistan* and *A Bend in the Ganges*, both of which feature omniscient third-person narrators, *Ice-Candy-Man* has a first-person point of view and hence, the narrator figure becomes all-important here. The novel shows the Partition as affecting, tainting, traumatizing, altering and radically transforming the child narrator. At eight, Lenny is already on the threshold of experience, but it should be remembered that in her case, her stepping into the world of experience is accelerated by the fact that her most impressionable years coincide with the communal upsurge that happened around the time and event of the Partition.

Ayah’s Circle, Ice-candy man and Ayah’s abduction

As Sidhwa shows it, Lenny’s initiation into Partition politics (albeit indirectly) happens through her Hindu Ayah, Shanta, and a motley group of men that she draws around her. She is established as an object of male desire quite early in the novel:

The covetous glances Ayah draws educate me. Up and down, they look at her. Stubhanded twisted beggars and dusty old beggars in crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretences to ogle her with lust. Hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists turn their heads as she passes, pushing my pram with the unconcern of the Hindu goddess she worships. (p. 12)

She is, however, not totally indifferent to the group of men that she regularly meets in Lahore. They number thirteen in all – and they include the Sethi family cook, the Government House gardener, the sepoy from the barracks, the butcher, the wrestler, the zoo attendant Sher Singh, the masseur, and the Ice-candy man. This motley group, whom Lenny collectively terms ‘Ayah’s circle’, is a truly ‘secular’ group, with members of almost all faiths and communities of the Indian subcontinent represented in it. And it serves as a kind of barometer in that little Lenny notices the tenuous changes that are taking place in Lahore on the eve of the Partition through the alterations that take place in the nature, number, mood and tenor of this circle. Ayah is polite to everyone in the group and enjoys their attention in general, but her most favoured suitors are Masseur and Ice-candy man, both of whom happen to be Mus-

lims. In the novel itself, the group is shown usually gathering in Queen's Park and discussing, like Lenny's Parsee parents and relatives, the political issues of the day. But as the communal situation gets increasingly tense in the city of Lahore in 1946 and early 1947 with demonstrations and meetings being held, the atmosphere of Queen's Park gradually changes, with people increasingly huddling together in separate communal groups. Only Ayah's group is shown to be (at least initially) unaffected by this creeping communal polarization, for as Lenny says, 'Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee are as always unified around her.' But it does not remain so for long – the numbers dwindle, the jokes become cruel and communal in colour, the arguments more heated, and finally the venue itself shifts from the Park to the wrestler's restaurant.

As Sidhwa depicts it, initially, there is great camaraderie within the group, but when bloodshed and mayhem are shown as becoming rampant in Lahore, there are only grudging pledges of solidarity amongst these friends culminating in the terrible confession of the Ice-candy man that after the Gurdaspur incident, he feels like butchering Hindus to which the Government house gardener touchingly replies, 'I have sent my family to Delhi (...) as soon as the sarkar permits, I will join them (...) when our friends confess they want to kill us, we have to go (...)' (p. 157). This dialogue takes place in Chapter 19, and Lenny is present when this conversation takes place. She invariably (though unwittingly) becomes a sharer in all the political talk that is a major ingredient of the novel; and it is chiefly through these conversations (which very often turn into bitter and acrimonious arguments) that she comes to know of the imminent Partition of the country and its chief players. 'Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Iqbal, Tara Singh, Mountbatten are names I hear,' she says early in the novel (p. 90). But though she hears a lot, she understands very little of the raging controversies over the Partition and, in fact, is quite confused as to what it means. 'Can one break a country?' she wonders, and worries about what it can do to her own daily life – 'And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road? How will I ever get to Godmother's then?' (p. 101).

These childlike confusions notwithstanding, Lenny is a very sensitive little girl, and politics apart, there are a lot of things she intuitively understands, the most remarkable of which is her growing perception of the importance of religious differences and of hierarchy in social life. In what is perhaps one of the finest passages in the book, Lenny says:

And I become aware of religious differences.

It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindle-

ling into symbols. Ayah is no longer my all encompassing Ayah – she is also a token. A Hindu. Carried away by a renewed devotional fervor she expends a small fortune in joss-sticks, flowers and sweets on the Gods and Goddesses in the temple.

Imam Din and Yousaf, turning into religious zealots, warn mother they will take Friday afternoons off for the Jumha prayers... Cramped into a narrow religious slot they too are diminished: as are Jinnah and Iqbal, Ice-Candy Man and Masseur.

Hari and Moti the sweeper and his wife Muccho, and their untouchable daughter Papoo, become ever more untouchable as they are entrenched deeper in their low Hindu caste. While the Sharmas and the Daulatrams, Brahmins like Nehru, are dehumanized by their lofty caste and caste marks.

The Rodgers of Birdwood barracks, Queen Victoria and King George are English Christians: they look down their noses upon the Pens who are Anglo-Indians, who look down theirs on the Phailbuses who are Indian-Christians, who look down upon all non-Christians.

Godmother, Slave sister, Electric-aunt and my nuclear family are reduced to irrelevant nomenclatures – we are Parsee.

What is God? (pp. 93-94)

Lenny loves Lahore, because that is the only place she has ever known and because all her loved ones live there. But on the eve of the Partition she now sees the city anew as a bone of contention between the Hindu and Muslim communities living there. When the Partition Awards are announced, it is indicated that nobody is happy with what is doled out. As it turns out, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, all want Lahore – the Hindus, because Lahore functions with Hindu money; and the Muslims because Lahore has a Muslim majority. Besides, the sheer indiscriminacy with which the Awards are announced stuns one and all.

Playing British gods under the ceiling fans of the Falettis Hotel – behind Queen Victoria's garden skirt – the Radcliffe Commission deals out Indian cities like a pack of cards. Lahore is dealt to Pakistan, Amritsar to India. Sialkot to Pakistan. Pathankot to India.

I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that. (p. 140)

Lahore, however, is not the only 'contentious' zone in the Punjab region. Another such town is Gurdaspur. And all Lahoris, as it transpires, want Gurdaspur on their side of the border. Everyone 'knows' that Gurdaspur will go to Pakistan, but in the end, it goes to India. There is 'trouble' and then 'the situation is reported to be under control', which, as the gardener says, only means that there is 'uncontrollable butchering going on in Gurdaspur' (p. 148).¹² And this is attested to very soon when a train comes from Gurdaspur to Lahore. As the Ice-candy man reports to his friends soon after the arrival of this train, 'Everyone in it [i.e. the train] is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts.' (p. 149)¹³ Ice-candy man knows about the incident because this train full of corpses incidentally included his own relatives, for whom he has been anxiously waiting for more than a day.

The Hindus and Sikhs in the group cannot face him after this incident; and when he sees them next, Ice-candy-man's rage is uncontrollable:

I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train (...) that night I went mad, I tell you: I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I'd known all my life! (...) I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women. (p. 156)

The critic Shirin L. Kudchedkar has pointed out that, 'This is perhaps the only occasion in the novel when we see events from the perspective of the killer, not of the victim.'¹⁴ But the killer, as Sidhwa shows us, is spawned by the violence itself. It is the Gurdaspur train incident that changes Ice-candy man. Revenge now seems to become his only motivation, and he is transformed from someone who had almost never given a thought to religious affiliations to a man who is unapologetically communal, a fanatic who probably gets his rival (Masseur) killed because he was in favour of Hindu-Muslim unity in the face of all odds, and most strangely of all, a man who abducts Ayah, the very woman he loves, because she is a Hindu. Ayah is subsequently gang-raped, and as if this physical abuse by the Muslim mob was not enough, she is then condemned to a life of prostitution in Hira Mandi. But the moment Ice-candy man gets wind of the fact that efforts were being made by her former employers to search her out and rehabilitate her, he promptly marries her, believing that he saves her that way (hence doing her a favour) as his cronies had wanted to kill her.¹⁵

It needs to be remembered here that in the case of Ayah's violation, sexual jealousy plays a very important part. Ice-candy man desired Ayah, but she loved Masseur. Until the time communal violence turns him mad, he however does not seem to be overtly affected by this. But as

soon as he turns communal, he seems to take the first opportunity to settle personal scores – taking revenge for the insult of being ‘shunned in favour of another lover’ by killing his rival and degrading the desired woman. As Kudchedkar pertinently says about this in her essay, ‘The Second Coming: Novels of the Partition’:

It is difficult to explain his [Ice-candy-man’s] behaviour in terms of psychological plausibility. There is no doubt that he ‘loves’ Ayah in his own way; he [later] follows her across the border into India. That he should yet wish to injure her in revenge for her preference for Masseur is plausible. But that he should prostitute her and then take her to himself is scarcely credible in a society where a woman once touched is tainted for ever. His own sense of ‘honour’, if not his devotion to her, would prevent it.¹⁶(Kudchedkar: 69)

It is interesting to note here that in *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sidhwa gives a twist to the interfaith romance that is a common feature in Partition novels. For one thing, unlike some other Partition novels (like *Train to Pakistan* discussed earlier in Chapter I of this book), there is a triangular love involved here where both the rivals are Muslims – one strongly believing in social harmony and the other only too susceptible to violence; but more importantly, as Paul Briens has pointed out: ‘Whereas in *Train to Pakistan* interfaith romance was a redemptive force in the face of violence, here it is an integral part of the violence’ (2003: 106)¹⁷.

Many critics have noted that Ayah’s abduction and humiliation must be understood in symbolic terms – and a most appealing interpretation of the novel is that Ayah is (especially keeping in mind the composition of her circle) actually symbolic of the Indian earth¹⁸ that was ravaged by the Partition of 1947. As Deepika Bahri has observed, Ayah is ‘installed in a metaphoric capacity from the beginning of the novel’¹⁹. (Bahri 2008: 98) and the reader is never allowed to forget this. But Ayah’s violation is symbolic in another respect, too, particularly when we see it in the broader context of the relation between violence and women’s sexuality in patriarchical societies such as India. In such societies, women’s bodies are construed as being nothing more than the receptacles of a man’s honour – and the act of violation emphasizes precisely this role of women as objects in male constructions of their own honour. To put it in the words of Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, ‘Women’s sexuality symbolizes “manhood”; its desecration is a matter of such shame and dishonour that *it has to be avenged*. Yet, with the cruel logic of all such violence, it is women ultimately who are most violently dealt with as a consequence.’²⁰ Inevitably then, women become the worst victims of atrocities during civil strife as victories against the enemy are inscribed,

marked and celebrated on their bodies. This was as true of the Partition of India in 1947 as civil strife anywhere else in the world. What however distinguished the events of 1947 was the sheer scale of the atrocities committed against women, especially in the Punjab. According to Urvashi Butalia, 'The figures [of women raped, abducted, tortured] range between 33,000-50,000 Hindu and Sikh women and 21,000 or so Muslim women' (1995: 81).²¹ Lenny's Ayah was just one among those thousands of victims.

Gurdaspur and Lahore

The Gurdaspur train incident, which is ultimately responsible for Ayah's fate, is not the only deed of communal violence documented in the novel. We are also given other vivid accounts of what happened immediately after the Partition. We actually get a two-pronged account here, for we are told what happened both in remote villages as well as in major cities. 'Ranna's Story'²², for instance, gives us graphic descriptions of how entire villages like Dera Tek Singh were wiped out, and we are also told what was happening in Lahore, post-Independence. At the same time, it needs to be stressed here that even though Sidhwa apparently tries to depict the atrocities committed by Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs without partiality in this novel, being a Pakistani writer she makes it obvious that her sympathies are more with the Muslim victims. For not only is a Sikh attack on a Muslim village in Punjab described vividly, but it is also seen through the eyes of a Muslim child, Ranna, a narrative device which automatically shifts the reader's sympathy towards the Muslims.²³ This is Sidhwa's way of accentuating the violence inflicted upon the Muslims by the Sikhs, an opinion the novelist expressed in an interview with David Montenegro, in which she said that 'the Sikhs perpetrated the much greater brutality (...) during the Partition violence of 1947.

It may be noted in this context that at least two historians have made the same observations about the atrocities in the Punjab in 1947. The British historian Nicholas Mansergh, for instance, writing about his visit to India in the summer of 1947, noted in an essay entitled 'The Last Days of British Rule in India: Some Personal Impressions' that at the time of his visit,

there was a widespread feeling, which in the light of after-events must honestly be recorded, that in the Punjab the Sikhs were spoiling for a fight, and whatever happened elsewhere, there serious trouble was hardly to be avoided.²⁴ (1999: 56)

Dominique Lappierre and Larry Collins, in their hugely popular documentary novel *Freedom at Midnight*, have also made a similar observation. In the chapter entitled 'The Greatest Migration in History', while chronicling the experiences of army officers in their population-exchange operations across the new western border in September 1947, Lappierre and Collins write:

Capt. R.E. Atkins and his Gurkhas spent weeks escorting refugee columns, taking Sikhs into India, then bringing a horde of Moslems back over the same route (...). Protecting those chaotic columns, spread out over miles of road and field, was a staggering problem. They were likely to be attacked almost anywhere along their march. As always, it was the Sikhs whose attacks were the most formidable and the most savage.²⁵ (1976: 220)

The historian Robin Jeffrey, writing roughly at the same time as Lappierre and Collins, has a completely different view on the subject. According to him, at least until August 1947, the Sikhs were '(...) more sinned against than sinning (...) [as they had been] abandoned by the British, tolerated by the Congress, taunted by the Muslim League, and, above all, frustrated by the failures of their own political leadership.'²⁶ Quoting Jeffrey in *India after Gandhi*, the Indian historian Ramachandra Guha also observes that 'The peculiar (not to say tragic) situation of the Sikhs best explains why, when religious violence finally came to the Punjab, it was so accelerated and concentrated' (2007: 29)²⁷. But another perspective is offered by Ian Talbot, one of the foremost authorities of the Partition on the Punjab side. Without going at all into the argument of who killed more during the Partition violence, Talbot in a discussion of Sidhwa's novel²⁸ simply states that: 'Its counterpart written from the non-Muslim perspective is the *equally harrowing account* of the attack on the Sikh minority of Sayyedpur contained in [Bhisam Sahni's Hindi novel] *Tamas*.'²⁹ Talbot then goes on to mention real-life incidents in 1947 that parallel the violent episodes in these two novels.³⁰

It will be clear from the above account that historians can probably never agree about the question of which community committed the greater atrocities during the Partition violence of 1947. Perhaps there is no such thing as a dispassionate, objective view when it comes to the recording of history – especially, when it comes to the recording of the atrocities of one group or community, or even one nation, against another. Sidhwa's Parsee child-narrator is supposed to give only a detached view of events, but as we can patently see, she cannot. What she does manage to convey truthfully, however, is her heartbreak and utter sense of desolation when she sees her familiar world fall apart in 1947.

The city of Lahore that she loves so much is reduced, we are told, to a wreck by the hellish fires of the Partition that never seem to end.

How long does Lahore burn? Weeks? Months? (...). Mozang Chawk burns for months... and months... And the hellish fires of Lahore spawn monstrous mobs. These no more resemble the little processions of chanting urchins that Warris Road spawned – and that Adi and I shouted ourselves hoarse in – than the fires that fuse steel girders to mortar resemble the fires that Imam din fans alive in our kitchen grates every morning. (pp. 139-40)

But it is noted too in the novel that while Lahore was burning, most of its resident Hindu and Sikh families were leaving it. As their neighbour Mr Singh says to Lenny's father: 'The Mehtas have gone! The Malothras have gone! The Guptas have gone! (...). I don't think there are any Hindu families left on Warris Road... Just two Sikh families. The Pritam Singhs and us' (p. 145). The novel also records the fact that as most people were leaving on very short notice, they were leaving behind most of their belongings, which were rampantly looted. Many of their houses too were indiscriminately ransacked and burnt. Almost overnight, hundreds of homes degenerated into empty and desolate shells. Some of the few that escaped this fate came to be used for other purposes, like the women's camp next to Lenny's house, which, after Ayah's abduction, becomes the focus of the narrative.

'Recovery and rehabilitation' – Hamida and Ayah

The most prioritized incident of violence highlighted in the novel is of course Ayah's abduction, which is shown to have a profound effect on Lenny. Almost the whole of Lenny's experience of the Partition is represented as having happened through Ayah and her circle. Also, and more importantly, since Ayah had always been a surrogate mother to Lenny, the residual guilt of unwittingly betraying her never quite leaves Lenny. The absence of Ayah is a void within, which nothing can fill up: 'Ayahless and sore-tongued I drift through the forlorn rooms of my house (...)' (p. 185). This is largely because Ayah had endeared herself to almost everyone in Lenny's family – in fact, she had come to be an integral part of the Sethi household. Always more than a servant, she was indulged and pampered by her mistress and the other servants alike. Hence, they all take an interest in and become associated with the activities of the adjacent camp for the recovery and rehabilitation of abducted women. They all sympathize with the hapless women of the camp particularly because Ayah had suffered a similar fate.

The focus on the rehabilitation camp in the novel is clearly neither incidental nor fortuitous, but a piece of vivid realism, for as social historians like Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin have recorded, together with mass abductions and the rape of women by the opposite community at the time of the Partition went earnest efforts to rescue and rehabilitate these women.³¹ These efforts were made not only by their own families and the authorities of the new nation states but also by ordinary people who were moved simply by the plight of the victims of Partition violence. Women played a central role in this respect. And Bapsi Sidhwa stresses just this fact in her novel in showing the efforts made by Lenny's mother and Electric aunt who try their bit to bring back some semblance of sanity in frenzied Lahore by 'smuggling the rationed petrol to help [their] Hindu and Sikh friends to run away and (...) to send kidnapped women (...) to their families across the border' (p. 242).

It may be noted here that though Lenny's mother and aunt do not play as pivotal a role as Lenny's godmother Rodabai, their contribution is no less significant for all that. In fact, the very profile of Lenny's family life changes because of her mother's secret missions. There is tension in the house, and Lenny in Chapter 22 is almost convinced that her mother and aunt are the secret arsonists who were putting Lahore to flames with the dickey of their car full of petrol cans. Mrs Sethi is also shown to risk disharmony at home for the greater cause of helping Hindu women who had been victims of violence. It may be said too that her and Electric aunt's efforts are especially laudable, as they are shown to be motivated purely by altruistic intentions. Since they are not part of the two contending communities, it would perhaps have been more convenient for them personally if they had remained detached or aloof. In fact, Sidhwa makes it a point to state that the declared policy of the Parsees of Lahore (as resolved in a public meeting at the city's Fire temple to celebrate the Allied victory at the end of the Second World War) was to 'run with the hare and hunt with the hounds'. As Colonel Bharucha (the president of the Parsee community in Lahore) reminds them more than once, being a tiny community that has to survive on the goodwill of the powers that be, they simply could not afford to take sides in any political crisis on the subcontinent, however great that might be.³² In the novel itself, the efforts of Lenny's mother and aunt at building bridges is manifested in the help and assistance they accord to Ayah. Without these women, Ayah would have been irrecoverably lost. At the same time, it must be noted that unlike many other women in her situation, Ayah does not accept her fate.

Social historians and chronologists of women's experiences during the Partition like Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin have noted that it was customary for women caught up in Partition violence to blame it all on

fate. Menon and Bhasin thus record the words of a woman named Gyan Deyi as saying:

(...) This was all fate... To leave one's country is fate. Now this [India] is my country, this has become my place. I am settled here (...). If a country is destined to be divided, it will be. Whatever is written will happen. Have I ever wanted to go back to Pakistan? No, one needs great strength for that and I am not strong enough. It's a dream I cannot afford to have.

Another widow of the Partition, Durga Rani, expressed similar sentiments when she said:

I have just blurted out everything to you today, everything that was boiling inside has just come out. Well, we got what was in our 'kismet'. We must not have done good deeds in the past. But I thank God everyday. I say, 'Many many thanks to you for giving me food to eat, clothes to wear.' Most of my life is over; the remaining few days will also pass.³³

We find an echo of this collective sentiment of resigned acceptance in the face of a relentless fate in the character of Hamida in *Ice-Candy-Man*. After Ayah's abduction, Hamida is recruited from the adjacent rehabilitation camp for recovered women by Mrs Sethi as a replacement for Ayah. It is significant though that she herself describes the camp as a 'camp for fallen women' – her self-definition as 'fallen' is eloquent not only of the way she is perceived by her society in general and the home she has left behind in particular, but also her own construction of her self and the parameters by which she reconstitutes her life and herself in a new environment.

Nothing much is told about Hamida in the novel, and we never come to know the exact circumstances of her violation. All we learn later is that she has four children and she knows that her husband would never accept her back and would, in fact, not even approve of her children meeting her. The overriding philosophy of Hamida's life is her belief that we mortals are 'khut-putlis, puppets, in the hands of fate. It's my kismet that's no good', she tells Lenny once. Ironically, it is this belief of hers in the inevitability (and essential cruelty) of fate that helps sustain her and sees her through this crisis in her life. Unlike Ayah, we are not told what happens to Hamida at the end of the book – whether she lived on in the same house or went elsewhere. This is because the prime focus of the novel is on Ayah and not on Hamida. The latter is, in fact, a relatively minor character in the novel. But her story is significant because it is a truly representative one – representative not only of

the tragedy of women violated during the Partition but also of the failure of the new nation states to address as well as redress their post-Partition problems.³⁴ As Sidhwa herself said to Alok Bhalla, ‘Hamida is a sort of composite figure (...) [for which] I drew upon all the stories of horror that were floating around me at that time’ (2006: 233)³⁵. Sidhwa certainly conceptualized Ayah very differently. Seen against Hamida’s story, Ayah’s is an exceptional one in that she is portrayed as one of those rare women victimized by Partition violence who defies her fate (though helped and aided by other women).³⁶

When in Chapter 30, Lenny (against stiff opposition) accompanies her godmother to meet Ayah at Hira Mandi, Lahore’s prostitute quarters, the latter is a ghost of herself. As a shocked Lenny observes: ‘Where have the radiance and the animation gone? Can the soul be extracted from its living body? Her vacant eyes are bigger than ever (...). Colder than the ice that lurks behind the hazel in Ice-Candy Man’s beguiling eyes’ (p. 272). Ayah is now clearly a broken-hearted woman, and the life has gone out of her; but even in that state, she is inflexible in her refusal to spend her life with Ice-candy man, however repentant he might be. She tells Rodabai in a voice that is ‘(...) harsh, gruff: as if someone has mutilated her vocal words (...). I will not live with him (...). I cannot forget what happened (...). I have thought it over... I want to go to my folk... whether they want me or not’ (pp. 261-63). She does leave him; stays in the women’s camp near Lenny’s house for a short while and then, eventually, we are told, joins her family at Amritsar. No amount of importuning, poetry-spouting or even pestering by Ice-candy man could make her change her mind. But of course, Sidhwa also makes it obvious that nothing of this would have been possible if Rodabai – Lenny’s beloved godmother, whom she trusts completely and admires without reserve – had not made her timely intervention. Godmother, we come to know from the novel, is an immensely resourceful person:

Over the years Godmother has established a network of espionage with a reach of which even she is unaware. It is in her nature to know things; to be aware of what’s going on around her. The day-to-day commonplaces of our lives unravel to her undercurrents that are lost to less perceptive humans. No baby – not even a kitten – is delivered within the sphere of her influence without her becoming instantly aware of its existence.

And this is the source of her immense power: this reservoir of random knowledge, and her knowledge of ancient lore and wisdom and herbal remedy. You cannot be near her without feeling her uncanny strength. People bring to her their joys and woes. Show her their sores and swollen joints. Distilling the right

herbs, adroitly instilling the right word in the right ear, she secures wishes, solaces grief and prevents mistakes. She has access to many ears. No one knows how many. (pp. 210-211)

All of this formidable arsenal Godmother brings to bear in Ayah's case, to help her escape from Hira Mandi, the point being that just Ayah's resolve by itself was not enough to get her out of that place.

This action of Godmother depicted in *Ice-Candy-Man* is also paradigmatic of what a number of real women did at the time of the Partition. In fact, what Godmother does in a private capacity in the novel had been enacted too by thousands of women spontaneously responding to the exigencies of the moment, many of them women who had never led a public life before then.³⁷

Lenny's awakening consciousness

All of this is there in the novel, but refracted through the prism of the child's mind, her developing consciousness and evolving awareness of the world outside. For Sidhwa's novel is, after all, a story of a child growing up, and the narrative of an irretrievable loss that changed many lives forever.

For Lenny, Ayah's abduction is undoubtedly an irretrievable loss. And it is while coping with it, or perhaps because of having to cope with it, that Lenny grows up fast. As Sidhwa shows, Lenny had always been a sensitive child, especially when it came to her Ayah. For instance, she is extremely alert to the difference in chemistry between Ayah and her band of close admirers – Sharbat Khan, Masseur, Ice-candy man:

Ayah is nervous in his [Sharbat Khan's] presence... they don't touch... They don't need to touch. His presence radiates a warmth that is different from the dark heat generated by Masseur's fingers – the lightning-strikes of Ice-candy man's toes. (p. 75)

But she comes to understand the darker side of love and passion and the vulnerability of being a woman only after Ayah's abduction:

If those grown men pay to do what my comparatively small cousin tried to do, [tried to show her, in his own inimitable fashion, what 'rape' meant] then Ayah is in trouble. I think of Ayah twisting Ice-candy man's intrusive toes and keeping the butcher and wrestler at arm's length. And of those strangers hands hoisting her chocolate body into the cart. That night I take all I have heard and learnt and been shown to bed and by morning I reel

dizzily on a fleetingly glimpsed and terrible grown-up world. (p. 241)

Lenny's journey of transition from innocence to experience, however, becomes complete only when she witnesses Godmother's confrontation with Ice-candy man:

The innocence that my parent's vigilance, the servant's care and godmother's love sheltered in me, that neither cousin's carnal cravings, nor the stories of the violence of the mobs, could quite destroy, was laid waste that evening by the emotional storm that raged round me. The confrontation between Ice-candy man and godmother opened my eyes to the wisdom of righteous indignation over compassion. To the demands of gratification – and the unscrupulous nature of desire. To the pitiless face of love.³⁸ (p. 252)

It is around the same time in the novel that Lenny comes to know about 'rape', 'fallen women' and 'unlucky 13'. She gets her 'first kiss' and voices her incredible romantic fantasies; becomes acutely conscious of the changes in her body. All of this is assisted by her near and dear ones, in small or big measure, especially by her cousin and Godmother. But she also gains insights on her own. And so, when Hamida, her new ayah, hearing a wailing woman in the neighbouring camp blames all their suffering on fate, Lenny is moved to protest: 'My heart is wrung with pity and horror. I want to leap out of my bed and console the wailing woman and slay her tormentors. I have seen ayah carried away – and it has less to do with fate than with the will of men.' (p. 214)

Agency to women

It is precisely this conviction that the 'will of men' had precipitated the Partition that sets this novel apart from the other Partition novels. *Ice-Candy-Man* is unique in depicting not only the violence that was unleashed on the women of the subcontinent but also in its valorization of the conviction and courage that women are capable of in times of crisis. Sidhwa's depiction of Lenny's own insights, of Ayah's outright refusal to accept her fate, of Godmother's resourcefulness, and of Lenny's mother and aunt's efforts at rehabilitation – all combine to provide agency to women in this novel. Sidhwa's Partition-centered narrative thus vindicates the power of women to make choices and to take the reins of their lives in their own hands, which actually amounts to an act

of stupendous defiance, especially if we keep in mind the particular circumstances of Ayah's predicament. Thus, though being a novel which apparently prioritizes a man at least in its title, *Ice-Candy-Man* subtly but effectively subverts the discourse of patriarchy and privileges female will, choice and strength along with the feminine qualities of compassion and motherhood.

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*

The Partition novels discussed so far – Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* – happen to be some of the most popular English novels written on this theme. But there are quite a few other novels that deal (very differently, though significantly) with the Partition which have never shared this limelight. Pre-eminent among them, to my mind, is Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980).³⁹

Desai stereotyped

There seems to be a critical consensus that *Clear Light of Day* (1980) has little to do with the theme of Partition. Part of the reason is (probably) because Anita Desai is predominantly identified with a particular type of fiction and a particular kind of character, an image that has stuck to her to this day. For example, in a very recent book on the history of Indian Literature in English, Shyamala A. Narayan and Jon Mee⁴⁰ have this to say about Anita Desai:

Born of a German mother and Bengali father, her fiction seems most confident when it deals with the educated upper-middle classes, but while Sahgal and Markandaya concern themselves primarily with the external political and social circumstances of their characters, Desai concentrates on their psychology. Indeed, she has often made her priorities in this respect clear:

Writing is to me a process of discovering the truth – the truth that is nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call Reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth... my novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics, or character.

This view of Desai (that her novels have nothing to do with politics), attested (as in the above quote) by the author herself, seems to be so firmly entrenched in the minds of critics that even when she writes a

different kind of fiction and creates a different kind of character, they fail to notice it. And they have failed to notice it most consistently in *Clear Light of Day*.

Critics on the novel

It is important to remember here that *Clear Light of Day* happens to be one of the most commented upon novels by Desai. Yet ironically enough, though there are innumerable articles and essays devoted to the finer points of this novel, the issue of the Partition does not figure in most of them. And even when it does, the statements are very often qualified by comparison with other (and more celebrated) Partition novels. Thus, Basavaraj Naikar writes in an article entitled 'The Paradox of Time in *Clear Light of Day*':

Anita Desai brings out the horror and the tragedy of the Partition (...) evocatively and memorably in Part II of the novel (...) although the Partition as such does not provide the leit motif or the theme for the novel as in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* or Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (...) ⁴¹

and Neeru Chakraverty asserts that:

The personal drama of the growing children is inextricably linked with the historical developments of the time, namely, the Partition trauma. The historical context is [however] not incorporated as in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy man*, where primal passions of love and hate impinge in a gut-wrenching way on the consciousness, but as a subdued historical event impinging on the adolescents' awareness, caught up in their own emergent selves. ⁴²

Even when *Clear Light of Day* is singled out for praise in the more general context of Desai's *oeuvre*, it is usually lauded for some aspect other than its connection with the theme of Partition. Thus, William Walsh categorically states, '*Clear Light of Day* shows Anita Desai's art at its most sensitively effective. It seems to me the height of her considerable achievement.'⁴³ Equally, Salman Rushdie, while celebrating Desai's *In Custody* in one of the essays in *Imaginary Homelands*, prefaces it with an introduction to Anita Desai and her novels thus:

The subject of Anita Desai's fiction has, thus far, been solitude. Her most memorable creations – the old woman, Nanda Kaul, in

Fire in the Mountain, or Bim in *Clear Light of Day* – have been isolated, singular figures. And the books themselves have been private universes, illuminated by the author's perceptiveness, delicacy of language and sharp wit, but remaining, in a sense, as solitary, as separate, as their characters.⁴⁴

This comment by Rushdie is especially significant because *Clear Light of Day* actually marks a transitional point⁴⁵ in Anita Desai's career, something that Rushdie totally misses out on (although he otherwise aptly sums up Desai's earlier fiction). For in this her fourth novel, she moves away from the private universe of solitary, alienated characters to portray an individual, who, though highly introverted herself, has perforce to negotiate with the outside world and public events. And this she is obliged to do because of the intrusion of the events of the Partition in her life. The Partition is indeed integrally related to the plot of the novel, and no matter how unnoticed this particular aspect of the novel has been, it is indubitably true that it is possible to read Anita Desai's fourth novel as one related to the Partition.

Anita Desai herself has not only spoken about her own experience of the Partition as a child, but has also given her own take on the novel, which leaves no doubt about its Partition connection. In an interview with Sunil Sethi for *India Today* soon after the publication of the novel, she said: 'My novel is set in Old Delhi and records the tremendous changes that a Hindu family goes through since 1947.' In the same interview, reminiscing about her own experience of the Partition, she said: 'I was ten at the time of Partition and profoundly affected by it; so much in our life suddenly changed character'⁴⁶.

Talking of families, it is important to note that all novels dealing with the Partition invariably show how the Partition affected the family unit on both sides of the border. To that extent, all Partition novels are family novels in one way or another. But *Clear Light of Day* is unique in that it is a novel that primarily focuses on the social unit of the family and shows how the Partition affected familial ties and interpersonal relationships.

***Clear Light of Day* as a Partition novel**

At one level, *Clear Light of Day* is a story of four brothers and sisters – Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba – and their interpersonal relationships, of how they come to terms with changing realities, and how they come to understand themselves and each other. Yet national history is inextricably bound up with the personal history of the siblings, for while they are not actively involved in politics, they are forced to make emotional

and intellectual adjustments in their lives due to the political upheaval all around them at the time of the Partition. In fact, the crisis in the nation coincides with the crisis in their own family life, a crisis which Bim aptly describes as the 'first terrible flood of life'. And it is at this very crucial phase that misunderstandings crop up between them. The novel actually turns around these misunderstandings (which they nurture for years) and their final resolution with the passage of time.⁴⁷

The siblings in the story are all shown to share an essentially deprived childhood, a fact which emotionally unites them in the formative years of their lives but ironically proves to be the cause of a split between them in their adult lives. They react to this childhood deprivation very differently, each trying to come out of it by taking a different route: Raja, the elder brother, who is 'naturally inclined towards society, company, applause; towards colour, song, charm' is more at home with the Hyder Alis because 'their almost shocking contrast'⁴⁸ with his own family fascinates him. He finds his own house 'dismal' and is convinced that 'no other family could have as much illness contained in it as his, so much oddity, so many things that could not be mentioned and had to be camouflaged or ignored' (p. 47). Tara, the younger sister, on the other hand, feels isolated both at home and in school in her growing years. To her dismay, she finds that she cannot share her elder sister Bim and her brother Raja's intellectual interests, and neither can she get the emotional security that she craves from Mira Masi, the destitute widowed aunt who had come to live with them and look after them. She thus edges closer to the neighbouring family of the Mishras, 'to the warmth (...) emanating from them, from their large, full, bustling household' and the Mishra girls become 'the closest certainty to friendship in Tara's forlorn experience' (p. 58).

Only Bim has no alternative, and seeks none. As Desai portrays her, she pursues no avenue of escape from the harsh environment she is hurled into and is abruptly made to take charge of. Instead of trying to be oblivious of the present reality by immersing herself in poetry (as Raja does) or simply escaping from it into a more relaxed and comfortable life through marriage (like Tara), she confronts it. As the novelist paints her personality, she considers it to be a test of her natural self to accept challenges and to lock horns with life. She thus shoulders the immense four-fold responsibility of taking care of her retarded youngest brother Baba, looking after the senile Mira Masi, nursing the malaria-stricken Raja back to normalcy, and being the guardian of Tara. After Tara leaves, Raja and she are thrown together for company and comfort even more than at any time of their lives. But when Raja too leaves her, because he could not 'go on living just to keep my brother and sister company (...) down in this hole' (p. 100), she takes complete charge of things at home – her home, which now comprises a derelict aunt and

an autistic brother. She rejects a marriage proposal, completes her education, and becomes a teacher.

None of the members of this family are thus shown in *Clear Light of Day* to be directly involved with politics, and yet the Partition invades their lives in devious ways. This mostly happens through the figure of Raja and his close association with their neighbour and landlord, Hyder Ali. At his most impressionable age, Raja is drawn to the figure of Hyder Ali, attracted by the man's refined and cultured personality, his library, his evening garden parties centering round politics and poetry, even his zenana (though fleetingly) through the person of his wife and daughter Benazir (whom he later marries). As Anita Desai depicts it, in almost no time Raja becomes the son Hyder Ali never had. In fact, Raja is shown in the novel to be accepted as an integral part of the Hyder Ali family, and he in his turn is clearly honoured and grateful to the household for giving him all that he craved for. Hyder Ali soon becomes for Raja not only the ideal of his life but almost the very reason for living. We learn from the story too that the influence of the Muslim gentleman is so strong on him that he wants to take up Islamic studies at Jamia Millia only because Hyder Ali wants him to. Raja is stung when his father vehemently opposes this and snubs him into submission by powerful arguments of a kind that the son had never imagined his perpetually absent and neglectful father to be capable of. He warns his son, 'If you, a Hindu boy, are caught in Jamia Millia, the centre of Islamic studies – as you call it – you will be torn to bits, you will be burnt alive.' And when Raja retorts, 'Who will do that to me?', he answers with pointed logic, 'Muslims, for trying to join them when they don't want you and don't trust you, and Hindus, for deserting them and going over to the enemy. Hindus and Muslims alike will be out for your blood' (p. 52).

This passage in the novel alerts us to the fact of how the spectre of the Partition was affecting one and all on the subcontinent in 1947. It is an established fact that massive migrations had started months before the Partition, displacing thousands of people on the eastern and western borders of the country. But even the sections of the population which were not directly threatened by the impending Partition (i.e. people who belonged to the majority community in a particular place) did not remain unscathed. Raja's father's words quoted above show how something as decisive as admission to a college (on which a middle-class youth's future depended) was affected by the Partition. And the all-encompassing political controversy surrounding the Partition and the hatred and suspicion that it generated led to a point where the two contending communities did not want to have anything to do with each other. Even when it came to educational institutions, there seemed to

be a neat division – Jamia Millia for the Muslims in Delhi, and Hindu College for the Hindus in the same city.

In Desai's novel, Raja reluctantly takes up English Literature at Hindu College at his father's insistence, only to discover that the institution has become a hotbed for politics, a place that spawns fanatics. His friends expect to find a revolutionary in him – 'his idealistic enthusiasm, his graceful carriage, his incipient heroism' (p. 57) leave them with no other option – and never forgive him for not being one. To top it all, not only does he not join them, he actually openly sympathizes with the Pakistani cause. His charmed friends therefore soon turn into dangerous enemies, threatening to report him to the police as a Pakistani spy. And true to their word, a policeman in plainclothes is posted outside the gate of their home for twelve hours for a couple of days. Mira Masi had always been apprehensive about the Hyder Ali connection; now, they are all positively frightened. Though nothing overtly violent happens, it creates a great deal of tension and fear in the family.

Raja's college friends, though, cannot be blamed for their suspicion, for it must have been extremely rare for a Hindu youth to espouse the cause of Pakistan in 1947. But the novelist makes it clear enough that Raja thinks the way he does not out of any ideological convictions but for emotional reasons, because of his bonding with his Muslim mentor. His response has thus nothing to do with politics whatsoever. Essentially of a romantic disposition, we are told in Chapter II that his idol was Byron and not Jinnah or Nehru, and he was himself naturally inclined more towards poetry than revolutionary politics. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that in Anita Desai's visualization at least, Raja represents an alternative viewpoint. His college admission, the fiasco attending it, his experience on the campus thereafter, and his unique position on the Pakistan issue (the way he responds to the Pakistani cause), all of these are, of course, directly related to the theme of Partition. But what needs to be noted here is that this very important aspect of the novel has hardly been highlighted in the existing body of criticism on Anita Desai's book.

One commentator however who does reflect on this Partition orientation of *Clear Light of Day* is Rani Uniyal, who succinctly sums up the connection of the Partition with the siblings of this story as follows:

The summer of 1947 was marked with Raja's illness at home and the country's partition outside. It marks the beginning of Bim's responsibility towards others and Aunt Mira's strange bent towards alcoholism. It is also the year that marks Tara's escape from the drudgery of the old Delhi house and the death of her father. It marks Bim's development as a new woman. Indeed,

the socio-political changes within the country have a strong bearing on the personal history of these characters.⁴⁹

In real history, however, the impact of the Partition continued for many months after the actual event and culminated with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, an event which, significantly enough, changes the lives of the siblings in the novel forever. To begin with, two very significant personal associations in the story are inextricably tied up with this national loss. As we are told in Chapter II, Bim had been out on a date with Dr Das that day (she had conceded to it out of gratitude for his patience with and compassion for the increasingly senile Mira Masi), but it had ended in disaster. That was the last time she met Dr Das – or at least that is how she chose to remember it. And when she came to know of the news of the assassination on the main street of Darya Ganj, she hurried back to give Raja the news, leaving Dr Das stranded on the road. At home, turning on the radio, Raja is said to be immensely relieved to know, for the sake of the Hyder Alis and their safety, that Gandhi's assassin was a Hindu and not a Muslim. Bim too is described as being relieved, but as much for his sake as for theirs. Only this relief does not last long, for amidst all the chaos and confusion that follows the Mahatma's death, Raja receives a letter from Hyder Ali telling him they are alive and safe in Hyderabad. Raja cannot wait any more and rushes to join his mentor without sparing so much as a thought for Bim or Baba.

Though she never says it, what hurts Bim beyond words is Raja's attitude. He is so blindly loyal to the Hyder Alis that all the while he is ill and even later, he broods and frets and fumes about nothing else but how they would cope with the difficulties in the aftermath of the Partition. It is ironic that he ignores what happens before his own eyes at home and empathizes with a family who after all settle down safely in Hyderabad. As we see at the end of Chapter II, Bim, rejected and cast out unceremoniously by the brother who meant everything to her, says not a word when Raja leaves. But the depth of her desolation comes out very poignantly in the passage in the same chapter where she is left alone with Baba at the end of the summer of 1947:

'Everyone's gone except you and I. They won't come back. We'll be alone now. But we don't have to worry about anyone now – Tara or Raja or Mira Masi... now that they have all gone.' (p. 101)

This callous rejection of his own family by Raja when in fact they were passing through their worst crisis ever and Bim required maximum support, is the beginning of the rift between brother and sister, and with time, this only increases.

Anita Desai's emplotment of the story in *Clear Light of Day* thus indicates that this happens because of Raja's association with the Hyder Alis and Partition. Very simply put, the plot of the novel shows that because of the Partition, the Hyder Alis had to leave; because they left, Raja followed suit; and because of this thoughtless action of Raja, his ties with his sister are severed. The Partition is thus shown to lead to the disintegration of the family, and this becomes a powerful image of the disintegration of the subcontinent of India into separate nation states.

Bim enabled

Yet, the novel also shows how the event of the Partition is an enabling experience, especially for Bim, as she starts to discover a new sense of personal identity for herself when she starts working and resumes her studies. She may have rejected Dr Das, but acting on his advice that she could train herself for nursing, she starts helping out in a clinic for women at the Kingsway Cross refugee camp in Delhi. In fact, Desai's narrative shows that she resumes her studies (in History) and starts this work at the same time. She therefore truly comes into her own only in the summer of 1947, after having being abandoned by her beloved brother. In other words, she becomes a type of the new, independent woman whom Simone de Beauvoir delineated as follows: 'Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe, there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator.'⁵⁰ Bim is of course a fictional character, but it is interesting to note that her case can be cited to describe: '(...) how the expansion of social space in the years following 1947 led to a number of cultural reorientations in society. Women moved out of their domestic insularity and underwent attitudinal changes as well' (Chanana 2004: 101)⁵¹.

Desai's revisioning of the traditional Partition narrative

As we have seen, there is a manifest revisioning of the traditional Partition narrative in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*. As the above analysis of the novel reveals, all the normal artifacts of the Partition are missing in it, all that is usually associated with the colossal upheaval that was the Partition. The brutal violence of the whole event – murder, rape, mutilation, as well as the mass migration and dislocation of millions of refugees who travelled and lived under inhuman conditions do not feature in *Clear Light of Day*. Even loss in the novel is more on a psychological plane. There is nothing in *Clear Light of Day* that is spectacularly

dramatic, the kind of thing one has learnt to expect from a Partition novel. The extreme experiences of the Partition do not figure here. For example, we do not see Bim inside a refugee camp, but on its fringes, in a clinic. We are spared the excruciating suffering that millions went through *inside* a camp. But then, we have accounts of it in other novels (notably, camp life in *Azadi*). All novels need not be the same. Granted, there are these unavoidable signifiers of the Partition. Though the most obvious ones are missing in this novel, quite a few are still there, but distanced – like the fire on the horizon, the refugee camp clinic, the absconding Muslim neighbours, and the news of Gandhi's assassination on the radio (which, many agree, signalled the end of Partition violence, at least in Delhi).⁵²

One of the alleged shortcomings of Desai as a novelist is that 'Her novels (...) deal with the class she knows best, but they do so at the expense of shutting out the much more complex Indian reality. She herself admits (...) that vast areas of the Indian experience cannot be within her easy reach'⁵³. I would, however, argue that, at least as far as *Clear Light of Day* is concerned, far from it being a shortcoming, Desai's focus on the elite and upper middle class of her society actually imparts a uniqueness to this Partition novel, because it offers us an alternative way of looking at this event. After all, the Partition did not affect just the people who were victims of communal violence or were uprooted from their land and rendered poor and homeless. It touched the lives of all Indians, especially on the eastern and western borders. And the case of Delhi was, of course, special. Being the capital city, the drama of the Partition was enacted there with an intensity probably lacking in other cities at the time. (Many of them had seen the worst massacres before August 1947.) There was a certain urgency to the situation in Delhi, and it went on for months – both before and especially after the Partition. And even people who had apparently nothing to do with the Partition were deeply affected by it. It changed their lives too. That is Desai's fundamental point in this novel – and though she says it in her own quiet way, it is a vitally important point. Her shortcomings as a novelist actually help her to give us a refreshingly new perspective on a much written about event.⁵⁴

3 The making of a nation: Religion or language?

Midnight's Children: A watershed

It is generally agreed that though English has been creatively used in India since the nineteenth century and literary production in it has strengthened since at least the 1930s, when it flowered in the hands of writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, Indian Writing in English, especially the Indian novel in English, properly came into its own only in the 1980s. This was not because of any previous dearth of talent, as every decade since Independence invariably produced a fresh crop of successful writers with their own special concerns. It was rather because of (among several other factors) the new energy that was infused into Indian Writing in English in the 1980s by its reception in the West in a way that it had never experienced before. And this turning point came with Rushdie's 1981 Booker Prize-winning novel, *Midnight's Children*.¹

Malcolm Bradbury, the chairman of the judges of the prize, hailed the novel as 'a genuine contribution to fiction, a brilliant experimental novel that is also a very funny book'.² Indeed, initially *Midnight's Children* was seen as merely a comic, irreverent and high-spirited novel about a fantastic protagonist whose birth coincided with the Independence of India. But gradually, as the eminent Indian critic Meenakshi Mukherjee has pointed out, *Midnight's Children* was 'appropriated into a theoretical discourse about nation, history and their narrativity'³. As to Rushdie's own motive in writing the novel, he once said in an interview that if the novel had any purpose, it was to '(...) say that the 32 years between independence and the end of the book did not add up to very much, that a kind of betrayal had taken place, and that the book was dealing with the nature of that betrayal'⁴.

In the novel itself, this betrayal is written about in Rushdie's inimitable style. When it was first published, *Midnight's Children* was hailed in the West as 'a continent finding its voice'. While that contention has been sharply (and quite rightly) refuted by Indian critics⁵, it cannot be denied that *Midnight's Children* is a singular achievement, not only because it is, as William Walsh says, '(...) a novel unprecedented in scope and manner in the history of the Indian novel in English'⁶ but also be-

cause it deals with the theme of Partition in a very unique manner. For, of virtually all the Indian English novels that deal with the Partition, *Midnight's Children* is the only novel that takes within its ambit both the Partition of 1947 which divided the subcontinent into a secular India and a Muslim Pakistan, as well as the later division of the two wings of Islamic Pakistan into two separate nations, Pakistan and Bangladesh, in 1971.

Rushdie's sweeping narrative begins long before the birth of the novel's protagonist, Saleem Sinai, with Saleem's grandfather Aadam Aziz's life history after his return to Kashmir from Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century (where he had gone to study medicine); before going on to trace the tragic trajectory of Saleem's businessman father, Ahmed Sinai, in the independent and so-called 'secular' India (and later in Pakistan); and ends with the birth of his son, Aadam, who represents the promise of a more pragmatic generation than Saleem's own. Politically, these three generations span the entire history of the Indian subcontinent from the Jallianwalabagh Massacre of 1919 to the Emergency of 1977.

Ever since it was first published in 1980, the novel has occasioned a considerable amount of critical discussion. In the 29 years since its first publication, apart from lengthy analyses in several seminal studies of Rushdie's oeuvre by (among others) Timothy Brennan⁷, James Harrison⁸ and Catherine Cundy⁹, *Midnight's Children* has produced a veritable deluge of articles and essays representing widely divergent critical responses. These range from responses that elicit comparisons with iconic European novels like *Tristram Shandy* and *The Tin Drum* to deliberations on Rushdie's use of history, to examinations of the magic realist mode in the novel and Rushdie's innovative use of the English language. Rushdie's own comments on the critical exegeses spawned by his novel deserve mention. In 2003, he wrote in an essay, 'Adapting *Midnight's Children*':

Interestingly, on the novel's first publication, Western critics tended to focus on its more fantastic elements, while Indian reviewers treated it like a history book. [Yet] however highly fabulated parts of the novel were, the whole was deeply rooted in the real life of the characters and the nation (...). And all around Saleem is the stuff of real Indian history.¹⁰ (2003: 79)

Indeed, as Timothy Brennan has remarked:

Midnight's Children is distinctive (...) in the way that it systematically sets out in discursive fashion, all the key historical road markers of the Indian postwar period inserting them into the

narrative like newspaper reports or like textbook lessons in modern Indian history: the massacre at Jallianwallah Bagh in Amritsar in 1919; the Partition of 1947; Nehru's First Five-Year Plan in 1956; Ayub Khan's coup in Pakistan in 1958; the India-China war of 1962; the India-Pakistan war of 1965; the creation of Bangladesh in 1971; and the Indian 'Emergency' of 1975.¹¹ (1989: 83)

Two aspects of the novel's representation of history usually missed

It is important to note that there are two aspects of the novel's representation of history that are all too easily missed by readers and critics alike. The first of these has to do with the nationalist movement itself, and the other with the Partition. About the former, Brennan perceptively notes that:

By far the most significant historical jump in *Midnight's Children's* time-frame is not so much temporal as thematic. No one has seemed to notice that the very staple of a major branch of Indo-English historical fiction, Gandhi's National Movement, is impertinently excised from the narrative outright, which rushes from Amritsar in 1919 to Agra in 1942 without so much as a passing comment! Thus, the story of Indian nationalism is erased from the book that documents its sad outcome, and the most dramatic illustration of Rushdie's argument is an absence.¹² (1989: 84)

There is however another very important facet of Rushdie's historical representation which has been overlooked even by Brennan – and that is the way it deals with the Partition. It is interesting to note here that even apart from the critics, Rushdie himself does not seem to consider *Midnight's Children* as a Partition novel per se. In an interview he gave to Salil Tripathi in 1983, he had said: 'Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is about the only good book on that theme. *Midnight's Children* uses the partition somewhat at a distance because the action is in Bombay.'¹³

But as this chapter will argue, *Midnight's Children* (notwithstanding the general opinions of its critics and even its author) is certainly a Partition novel, and a very unique one at that. Indeed, there are three key aspects about the treatment of the Partition in this novel which sharply differentiate it from the other novels discussed so far. The first aspect is that *Midnight's Children* deals with both the partitions of the subcontinent, that is, the one of 1947 as well as the later one of 1971; second, that its characters inhabit all three partitioned states of India, Pakistan

and Bangladesh; and third, that it uniquely represents the precise moment of the birth of the nation.

Freedom at midnight: The moment of birth

To take the last of the above-mentioned points first (i.e. the depiction of the precise moment of the nation's birth), it is a fact that while *Midnight's Children*, like a few other Partition novels before it, also depicts the event of the Partition, it does so from a completely fresh narrative perspective. There are two chapters in Book I of *Midnight's Children* that deal with the event of the Partition, the chapter entitled 'Methwold's Estate' which is the prelude to the end of Book I, and 'Tick, Tock', the very last chapter of the first book which enacts the steady, metronomic beat of a countdown to 'an approaching, inevitable midnight'¹⁴.

Methwold in the novel is a reluctantly departing colonial who sells his estate in Bombay to a select group of the city's Indian elite (one of whom is Saleem's father Ahmed) before finally leaving India's shores. Both Methwold and the selling of his property are significant, for Methwold sells his estate (consisting of four identical houses built in European style and named after the royal palaces of Europe) on two conditions. These conditions, which display his reluctance to let go his erstwhile holdings, were that, first the houses should be purchased with every last thing still in them and that their 'entire contents' were to be retained by the 'new owners'; and second, that 'the actual transfer should not take place until midnight on August 15' (p. 95). The transfer of assets at Methwold's estate is thus both a metaphor for and a parody of the political transfer of power that was happening in India at the time.

Additionally, Methwold himself is also important because (as it turns out) he is the biological father of Saleem. And this is a fact that has a significance beyond its immediate ramifications, particularly as Saleem, who is taken to be 'the chosen child of midnight', ironically turns out to be an Anglo-Indian, the illegitimate son of a devious colonizer and a poor Hindu woman, Vanita. Throughout the novel, the narrator tries to establish that the history of Saleem's life is the history of the country and that Saleem is India, and India is Saleem. His family genealogy is also presented in this light in the novel. Hence, it can be said that if Aadam Aziz (Saleem's grandfather) embodies the established narrative of Indian History, then this alternative genealogy expresses a dissatisfaction with national history and a rejection of the Indian nation state itself as the bastard product of England's violation of the subcontinent.¹⁵ In other words, Rushdie seems to be arguing that the new state that came

into being on 15 August 1947 was Indian in its colour, composition and make-up, but its pedigree was unmistakably British.

The birth of the nation and the novel's protagonist both happens 'at the stroke of the midnight hour'. But we have already been given an inkling of this by the announcement of a prize in the previous chapter of the novel, which is a truly new device that Rushdie introduces in the plot. We are told that the daily newspaper, *Times of India*, searching for a human-interest story for the Independence celebrations, announced a prize to any Bombay mother who would 'give birth to a child at the precise instant of the birth of the new nation' (p. 99). Seeing this in the papers, the protagonist's would-be mother, Amina, was absolutely sure that she would win the prize. But she had stiff competition from two other women within Methwold's Estate itself – Nussie (wife of the Parsee lawyer, Ismail Ibrahim) and Vanita (wife of the street accordionist and entertainer, Wee Willie Winkie). A certain comic element is introduced in the countdown to 15 August in the narrative, because of this aspect of rivalry surrounding the birth of the protagonist.

But there are ominous strains too in the prelude that leads to the final countdown to the moment of India's independence. And these are introduced through the character of Joseph D'Costa, the communist lover of Mary Pareira, the virgin midwife at Dr Narlikar's Nursing home. Joseph hated the rich and was, like Aadam Aziz, sensitive to the winds of change. He had sniffed the air blowing from the north and concluded: 'this independence is for the rich only; the poor are being made to kill each other like flies. In Punjab, in Bengal' (p. 104). Enraged by the Partition riots, Joseph turns his attention from plump, virginal Mary to the more 'patriotic cause of awakening the people' (p. 103) to the concealed fakery of Independence. This turns Mary distraught, and she commits the terrible deed of swapping the babies born to Amina and Vanita, legitimate and illegitimate babies, respectively.

Joseph's predictions about and assessment of India's Independence draws our attention away from Methwold's Estate and the euphoria all around to the 'other' gruesome things that were happening all over India but were not given priority in official reports. It is important to point out here that Rushdie's fictional prioritization of the events at Methwold's estate is very much like Nehru's skirting of the trauma of the Partition and his romanticization of the event of emancipation from the British in his famous 'freedom at midnight' speech, which ran (in part):

The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future? Freedom and power

bring responsibility. That responsibility rests upon this assembly, a sovereign body representing the sovereign people of India. *Before the birth of freedom we have endured all the pains of labour and our hearts are heavy with the memory of this sorrow. Some of those pains continue even now.* Nevertheless, the past is over and it is the future that beckons to us now.¹⁶

It may be noted here that towards the end of the second paragraph of the given quote (i.e. the lines in italics), Nehru is actually talking about the Partition without mentioning the word. It is a glaring, deliberate gloss-over, suitably capped by a flourishing last sentence.

It will be seen that just as Nehru foregrounds the prize of Independence and the promise that it holds, the inhabitants of Methwold's estate are more caught up with the promised *Times of India* prize. What needs to be noted particularly is that neither in Nehru's speech nor in the reflections of all the would-be fathers at Dr Narlikar's clinic is there even a single mention of the word 'Partition' or of all the tragedy and irony of the violence that came after decades of non-violent struggle for independence. And that this parallel with Nehru's speech is meaningful is further evidenced by the fact that all the major events that happen in this chapter of *Midnight's Children* literally happen within the same three- to four-minute time span that Nehru's speech must have taken to have been delivered.

In his novel, Rushdie focuses on what is happening with a single family at the time of the Partition, and it is amazing to note how much happens in these three to four minutes. To summarize: two children are born to parents of widely different backgrounds: one (Saleem) is born on the stroke of midnight, at the precise moment of the country's birth; and the other (Shiva) arrives within a minute of Independence. Next, Ahmed Sinai breaks his toe when he absent-mindedly drops a chair that he was carrying on hearing from Dr Narlikar that he has had a son. Then, in a most dramatic twist in the narrative, the two babies are swapped by the distraught midwife Mary who does it foolishly thinking it to be 'her own private, revolutionary act' for which Joseph would love her. One of the women, Vanita, dies in childbirth, leaving her husband utterly desolate. But for the other couple, Ahmed and Amina (who would be the parents of the child they had not conceived), it is a moment of happy togetherness, as husband and wife regard the newborn child, and the mother in particular feels enormously relieved and happy: happy to have won the *Times of India* prize after all (she asks her husband to contact the paper); and relieved that contrary to the strange predictions of the soothsayer Ramram Seth, her son thankfully had only one head.

In all of this, it is the baby-swapping that is the most important. Rushdie himself elucidated why he used this device in an interview with Chandrabhanu Pattanayak:

[The swapping] was partly because I thought of a sort of dualism between the children – they represent wealth and poverty, reason and unreason, peace and war and so forth. But also I wanted them to be not the children of their parents; I wanted them to be the children of the times. And the exchange, by divorcing them from their actual bloodlines, was a way of achieving that.¹⁷

But there's also another aspect to this issue. As a recent critic, Nandini Bhattacharya, has pointed out:

In the figure of Saleem (whom Nehru calls the mirror of the nation), Rushdie also attacks the concept of the nation as a pure, essential and unchanging space, comprising of a group of homogeneous people moving towards a common destiny. As a 'monster' born of triple mothers – the Hindu Vanita, the Muslim Amina and the Christian Mary – and three fathers – the departing colonialist Methwold, the street musician Wee Willie Winkie, and businessman Ahmed Sinai – Saleem represents the new-born nation in all its heterogeneity, and bewildering plurality.¹⁸

The narrator, highly self-conscious as he always is, seems to be well aware of this excessive focus on a particular event in a particular family on the momentous night of August 15 – and cannily admits, as if to forestall criticism:

I shall not describe the mass blood-letting in progress on the frontiers of the Punjab (where the partitioned nations are washing themselves in one another's blood...); I shall avert my eyes from the violence in Bengal and the long pacifying walks of Mahatma Gandhi.

But then, he justifies himself by saying: 'Selfish? Narrow-minded? Well, perhaps; but excusably so, in my opinion. After all, one is not born every day' (p. 130).

The interesting thing to note here is that, despite all such protestations, he eventually does mention the unavoidable facts of the Partition, though in a very unusual and macabre fashion.

Suddenly everything is saffron and green (...). Saffron minutes and green seconds tick away on the clocks on the walls. Outside

Dr Narlikar's Nursing Home, there are fireworks and crowds, also conforming to the colours of the night – saffron rockets, green sparkling rain; the men in shirts of zafaran hue, the women in saris of lime.

(...) Saffron-shirted, green-skirted, the crowd throng in the illuminated streets, beneath the infinite balconies of the city on which little dia-lamps of earthenware have been filled with mysterious oils; wicks float in the lamps which line every balcony and rooftop, and these wicks, too, conform to our two-tone colour scheme; half the lamps burn saffron, the others flame with green.

(...) And in all the cities all the towns all the villages the little dia-lamps burn on window-sills porches verandahs, while trains burn in the Punjab, with the green flames of blistering paint and the glaring saffron of fired fuel, like the biggest dias in the world. (pp. 132-134)

This description constitutes a kind of montage representing multiple visions on Rushdie's part which serves to replace the unilinear version of official history by an alternative view that takes into consideration a number of contrasting realities and displays the varying impact of the event of the Partition on different sections of the people.

In noting the uniqueness of Rushdie's depiction of the Partition, one is also led to take into consideration his independent stance on Indian Independence:

This year – fourteen hours to go, thirteen, twelve – there was an extra festival on the calendar, a new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream; it was a mass fantasy shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat, and would periodically need the sanctification and renewal which can only be provided by rituals of blood. (pp. 129-130)

Every key phrase in this articulation of the significance of Indian Independence is loaded with meaning. The countdown itself ('fourteen hours to go, thirteen, twelve') is significant, not only because it gives the chapter its name ('tick-tock'), but also because it reminds us that a countdown is usually a prelude to the launch of a rocket or the explo-

sion of a bomb and that Indian Independence is one such cataclysmic event. The countdown ends at 'twelve', of course ('when clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting'), which is a moment of transition, a time marking a change from (to borrow Nehru's words) 'the old to the new'¹⁹, from sleep to awakening, from darkness to light. The word 'festival' draws our attention to the fact that it is a celebration, but the usage of the word is deeply ironic, because it also marks a tragedy, since India won its freedom and got partitioned simultaneously. While liberation from the British is a cause for celebration, the 'dream' of freedom, Rushdie points out, is not shared uniformly, but only in 'varying degrees' by the different communities living in the land. So, the lack of uniformity in the newly created nation is declared here itself. The phrase 'never previously existed' further draws our attention to the re-drawing of the political map of the Indian subcontinent.

But noticeably, Rushdie also anticipates the Andersonian theory of the 'nation' as an imagined community, when he has the narrator say that India exists only 'by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will'. For Benedict Anderson published his seminal work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*²⁰, only in 1983 – that is, three years after *Midnight's Children*. It should also be noted that the nation, along with other 'narratives', has been rigorously investigated in post-colonial discourse, especially in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Rushdie's narrative is a part of this discourse.²¹ It is also important to point out here that the question of narrative apart, one of the chief preoccupations of Rushdie as a writer has been with the 'idea' of India and he has come back to it again and again in both his fiction and non-fiction. In an essay entitled 'The Riddle of Midnight: India, August 1987', written to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Indian independence, Rushdie asked, 'Does India exist?' and then went on to answer this question himself:

It's when you start thinking about the political entity, the nation of India, the thing whose fortieth anniversary it is, that the question starts making sense. After all, in all the thousands of years of Indian history, there never was such a creature as a united India. Nobody ever managed to rule the whole place, not the Mughals, not the British. And then, that midnight, the thing that had never existed was suddenly 'free'. But what on earth was it? On what common ground (if any) did it, does it, stand?²² (1991: 27)

Again, a whole decade later, on the golden jubilee of Indian independence in 1997, he wrote an article (originally commissioned and published by *Time* magazine) where, after listing all the things that had gone wrong with India in the fifty years of its free existence, and in-

forming his readers that many of her citizens (whom he claimed to have personally spoken to during a recent visit) did not feel the urge to celebrate the jubilee and had good enough reasons for feeling so, he nevertheless went on to add:

And yet I do feel like celebrating (...). Above all... I want to extol the virtues of the most important thing that came into being on that midnight 50 years ago, the thing that has survived all that history could throw at it; that is, the so-called 'idea of India'. I have spent much of my adult life thinking and writing about this idea.²³ (2003: 178)

Bombay-Karachi-Dhaka

The 'idea' of India, as it transpires in *Midnight's Children*, has no uniformity about it. For though India came into being, according to the novel's narrator, by the effort of a 'phenomenal collective will', the collective life of its citizens definitely did not move in the same direction. Trumpeted as a 'secular' democracy at the time of its birth, the new nation state of India meted out (as shown in the novel) a very different treatment to its Muslim populace, at least in the initial years of its independent existence. Rushdie has very deftly traced the fate of India's Muslims through the fortunes of the Sinai family in the novel, by showing how they and their relations shift from one city to another on the subcontinent in search of wealth and security. Originally from Kashmir, the family (from Saleem's maternal side) moves to Agra, in British India, in 1919. From then on, the travails of Saleem's family are shown in the novel to symbolically correspond with key events in India's postwar history. Saleem's maternal grandfather, Aadam Aziz, had always felt a little alien in his own land, as he could not share the faith of his Muslim brethren, being 'unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve' (p. 12). He is the quintessential secular figure in *Midnight's Children*, a man who had no compunctions even in throwing out a maulvi from his house because he was teaching his children to hate people of other faiths. Indeed, as Rushdie draws him, he is almost Nehruvian in his deep faith in the secular essence of the land he lived in. Thus, though initially he felt out of place when he first left his native princely state of Kashmir to practice medicine in Agra in British India, Aziz stopped being a 'Kashmiri' and finally started feeling an 'Indian' at the time of the 'Quit India' movement. From this moment of time, he is shown as totally identifying himself with the creed of the nationalist movement, and hence, when he has to choose between India and Pakistan at the time of the Partition, he simply refuses to leave

Agra for Pakistan, which, according to him, is a godforsaken country. However, this does not stop his children from being scattered over far-flung parts of the subcontinent. Two of his daughters go to Pakistan: the youngest daughter Emerald, with her husband Zulfikar, who lays the foundations of an immense fortune by buying up refugee property at absurdly low prices; and the unmarried Alia, who starts teaching in a Karachi school. Their elder son, Hanif, rejects Pakistan and arrives in Bombay to become the youngest director in Hindi cinema and marries the beautiful actress Pia; while the other son, Mustapha, joins the Indian Civil Service. The novel shows too that the elder daughter of Aziz, Amina, and her husband Ahmed Sinai begin their conjugal life in the heart of Old Delhi. But it is in this brief period of their stay (when Saleem is conceived) that they face 'the gathering pre-Independence storm' which forces them to leave the communally charged capital of Delhi for the '(...) secular, cosmopolitan (...) tolerant, broad-minded city' of Bombay.²⁴

It may be pertinent to remember here that Rushdie's own family had suffered a similar fate in 1947. Writing about this almost two decades after the publication of *Midnight's Children*, he observed:

My own family, like so many of Muslim origin, was cut in half by partition. My parents opted to stay in Bombay, and so did my two uncles and their families, but my aunts and their families went to West Pakistan, as it was called until 1971 (...). We were lucky, escaping the worst of the bloodletting, but our lives were defined and shaped by the frontier separating us.²⁵ (2003: 176)

The life of Saleem and his family are likewise similarly defined by the Partition. And in the novel itself, one of the things that it leads to is that the protagonist and his family end up inhabiting all the three post-partitioned states of the subcontinent, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In the year of Independence itself, the Sinais, as an affluent Muslim family, fall victim to the discriminating attitude and politics of the so-called 'secular' state of India. When the Government of India freezes the assets of many affluent Muslims to force them to flee to Pakistan, Saleem's family is severely affected. Saleem's father, Ahmed, who has a propensity for making wrong financial moves, is totally devastated by this. However, it is Amina, Saleem's mother, who rises to the occasion and fights Ahmed's battle against the state on his behalf aided by the crooked lawyer, Ismail Ibrahim, and by the money she wins (with surprising regularity) at the racecourse. But Ahmed continues to act irresponsibly even after this. At the prodding of his gynaecologist friend, Dr Narlikar, he revives his dream project of land reclamation and invests huge sums without keeping any record of his involvement in the scheme. But Narlikar's sudden death in mob-violence leads to Ahmed's

financial ruin and eventually to his mental decline. Destitute, his family is forced to migrate to Karachi in Pakistan where they seek asylum in the house of Saleem's aunt, Emerald.

Saleem, leaving the 'highly-spiced non-conformity of Bombay' (p. 308) now finds himself in a country where 'truth is what it is instructed to be' (p. 326). The Karachi years, as depicted in the novel, trace the tumultuous adolescence of Saleem, who has to face the multiple agonies of a disintegrating family, a loveless existence and the shameful discovery of his incestuous love for his own sister, the 'Brass Monkey', who is magically transformed in the course of a few years into 'Jamila the Singer'. There is a brief happy interlude in Saleem's life following his father's sudden heart attack when the family returns to Bombay for a while, only to begin a whole new life in Karachi again, once Ahmed recovers. Ahmed starts a towel business there named after Amina, which is a huge success, becomes his old jovial self, falls in love with his wife, and discovers a new affection for his son. But this bliss does not last long. As we are informed in Chapter 23 ('How Saleem Achieved Purity') of *Midnight's Children*, the Indo-Pak war of 1965 all but obliterates the family when their house in Karachi is bombed. Saleem is hit by a spittoon on his head, survives the injury, but loses his memory and later joins the Pakistani army's covert operations in Dhaka. Thus, after a childhood spent in India and his adolescence experienced in Pakistan, Saleem comes to spend a crucial year of his adult life in the soon-to-be born nation of Bangladesh and, as an agent of the Pakistan army in Dhaka, becomes a part of an epochal event in the history of the subcontinent.

The novel thus charts the disintegration and peculiar predicament of the Muslim community on the subcontinent for whom neither Independence nor the Partition managed to deliver the promised goods. Indeed, the course of events as set out in *Midnight's Children* clearly shows that between the hypocritical 'secularism' of independent India and the stifling of all civic freedoms in Islamic Pakistan, the Muslims of the subcontinent had very little to choose from. It is crucial to remember here that an overwhelming number of Partition novels prior to Rushdie's were predominantly preoccupied (in varying degrees) either with the sudden deterioration in Hindu-Muslim relationships at the time of the Partition (when friends and neighbours turned enemies almost overnight), or else with the celebration of Hindu-Muslim ties in the midst of the communal holocaust. In other words, it was the social relationship between the two contending communities in India that was given pride of place in the earlier Partition narratives, and those relations were invariably construed in terms of simplistic love/hate paradigms. Certainly, the predicament of the Muslim minority in India (over the question of whose status and future security the country was

partitioned in the first place) did not receive any serious consideration in Indian-English fiction. It was Rushdie who for the first time focused on this issue, perhaps helped in no small measure by the fact that to a great extent Saleem's story was his own story, too. And it will perhaps not be wrong to say that it is this autobiographical element that imparts a certain authenticity and poignancy to the narrative of *Midnight's Children*, for the novel has as its source all the validity of the author's own lived experience.

1971 Bangladesh Liberation War

The single-most outstanding feature of Rushdie's representation of the Partition in *Midnight's Children* is, neither the delineation of the magic moment of 'the midnight hour' of 15 August 1947, nor the many and varying experiences of the Sinai family in Bombay and Karachi in the first two decades of the newly created nations' existence. It is rather the depiction of the genocide that preceded the Bangladesh War of Independence. In fact, it is the depiction of this second Partition of the subcontinent in *Midnight's Children* that needs special focus as it throws up a number of vital questions regarding some of the fundamental issues that were at stake in 1947, and which were (as the history of the new nation states were to prove) in no way resolved by dividing the subcontinent on the basis of religion. Critics have largely ignored this vital aspect of Rushdie's narrative. But since this paradigmatic post-colonial text is as much about nationhood and its narrativity as about anything else, it is therefore perhaps important to look afresh at the novel's treatment of the 1971 war in this context.

It is the third part of *Midnight's Children* that deals with this second division of the subcontinent. Book II of the novel ends with the Indo-Pak War of 1965, and Book III begins with the prelude to the 1971 war. The first (according to Saleem) was aimed at annihilating his family, and the second to reunite him with his friends and his old life. Only three chapters are devoted to the representation of the Bangladesh War: 'The Buddha', 'In the Sunderbans' and 'Sam and the Tiger', respectively. However, it is basically the first and third chapters that deal with the war or, more specifically, with the political development in Pakistan in a single year, between December 1970 when Mujib-ur-Rahman's Awami League swept the country's polls, and December 1971 when Bangladesh came into being. What happens in the five intervening years between 1965 and 1970 – both in Pakistan and in Saleem's life – is summarized in a few paragraphs at the beginning of this section.

The narrative in Book III commemorates the political crisis in Pakistan following the Indo-Pak war of 1965 over Kashmir, when discontent

with the military regime grew steadily, as did agitation for greater democracy. In 1969 General Ayub Khan resigned as President and handed power over to General Yahya Khan, the head of the Pakistani army. The latter declared martial law but also scheduled elections for 1970. In this election, Mujib-ur-Rahman's Awami League in East Pakistan won a crushing victory over the People's Party of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. However, Mujib was denied the right to form a new government by the West Pakistani leaders. This political stalemate plunged the country into a civil war as Mujib led the East wing into secession and declared it independent as 'Bangladesh'.²⁶ The fratricidal war that followed, which witnessed 'the biggest migration'²⁷ and one of the worst genocides in human history, ended in the disintegration of the two wings of Pakistan which had been held together, despite their linguistic and cultural differences, by (what Rushdie calls) the 'glue' of religion.²⁸

These political events leading to the dismemberment of Pakistan are presented in Chapters 24 and 26 of the novel as a kind of journalistic reportage, but the atrocities of the war and what it meant in human terms are vivified through the experience of three boy-soldiers – Ayooba Baloch, Farooq Rashid, Shaheed Dar – who are part of a special 'canine unit for tracking and intelligence activities' (CUTIA, in short),²⁹ with Saleem as their tracker.

In Rushdie's depiction, the war itself is ironic and ambiguous since it is a war that is defined by utter confusion as all the parties involved – Pakistan's west wing, east wing and India – are all shown to be highly confused as to their aims and objectives. In a fundamental way, the Bangladesh chapters in *Midnight's Children* question the very idea of a pan-Indian/pan-Islamic identity. Ayooba Baloch, the leader of the cutia-unit 22 (of which Saleem is the tracker), for instance, is all excited about tracking down 'vegetarian Hindus', but soon realizes that his unit was covertly brought to Dacca only to root out 'fellow meat-eaters' or, in other words, to kill their own brethren. Disillusioned, he loses his zeal in the operations. Rushdie's portrayal of the activities of the Mukti Bahini, who helped the Indian troops against the occupying Pakistani west wing forces in the winter of 1971, can be seen as a variation of the same theme. This is because the revolutionaries are shown to be ironically and blissfully unaware that India was not there just to play the role of a benevolent elder brother. Rushdie's text makes it clear that the Indian intervention was in fact propelled by mostly deeply selfish reasons, by the Indian government's keeping in mind its own immediate and long-term interests. One of the most immediate and pressing of these was the influx of vast numbers of refugees driven into India by the atrocities of the Pakistani army. As the narrator elaborates in the chapter, 'Sam and the Tiger':

The Indian intervention in the Bangladesh dispute was also the result of the interaction of great forces. If 10 million had not crossed the border obliging the Delhi government to spend \$ 200,000,000 a month on refugee camps (...) Indian soldiers, led by General Sam, would never have crossed the frontiers in the opposite direction. (p. 447)

Here, one is reminded of a memorable passage in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*, where the narrator talks about the effect of the 1971 War on a small border village in West Bengal:

Long before the world had sniffed genocide in Bangladesh, Lalpukur began to swell. It grew and grew. First, it was brothers with burnt backs and balls cut off at the roots. Then it was cousins and cousins of cousins. Then it did not matter; borders dissolved under the weight of millions of people in panic-stricken flight from an army of animals.³⁰ (1986: 59, 60)

But the influx of refugees apart, there were other vital/strategic/long-term reasons for the Indian Government to rally behind the cause of the Awami League and Bangladesh. As Willem van Schendel elaborates in his chapter on the 1971 Liberation War in *A History of Bangladesh*:

One of the concerns that had propelled India into invading the delta and installing a new government was a fear of radicalisation among the freedom fighters. The Indian regions surrounding Bangladesh were politically unstable: in West Bengal Maoist revolutionaries, known as Naxalites, were active and so were various groups fighting for autonomy in North-east India. During the war many freedom fighters had begun to imagine a liberated Bangladesh not just as an independent state but also as a socialist society. This prospect worried India's policy-makers for two reasons. First, it might provide the Naxalites and other leftist rebels with strategic cross-border links; and second, nationalisation of land in Bangladesh could lead to an exodus of dispossessed landholders to India. Ensuring a non-radical government policy in Bangladesh was high on India's wish list, and this is why it threw its support squarely behind the Awami League leaders who had formed the Bangladesh government-in-exile in India during the war.³¹ (2009: 175)

The Bangladesh War of Independence was replete with surprises; and in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie does manage to convey the dramatic way in which it unfolded right from start to finish. We are told how, in

March 1971, west wing forces, with the help of crack troops (of which Saleem's 'cutia' unit is a part), wreak havoc on unsuspecting civilians in Dacca. However, by December 1971 (i.e. within nine months), the course of the war changes dramatically, and this time, it is the Mukti Bahini volunteers who terrorize west wing officials and soldiers alike in the east wing. Within a short while, in fact, things are shown to speed up even more in the novel, so that it would all be over in three short weeks. What would remain is a devastated Pakistan – having sustained losses of half of her navy, a third of her army, a fourth of her airforce, and, after her general (Tiger Niazi) surrendered³², half of her population as well.

Rushdie thus points out the irony, ambiguity and savagery of the Bangladesh War in his novel, but the significance of the Bangladesh chapters can be properly understood only in conjunction with a much earlier chapter in the novel, Chapter 2 of Book I, entitled 'Mercurochrome'. Both sections deal with violence, 'Mercurochrome' with one of the worst massacres in Indian history at Jallianwalabagh in April 1919 when General Dyer opened fire on an unarmed crowd, and Chapters 24-26, with a defining civil war on the Indian subcontinent in 1971. But the registers of depiction are very different in the two cases. There is a kind of distancing in the first instance against the graphic description of violence in the latter, which is not only horrific but also nauseating. 'Mercurochrome' depicted a colonial power's brutal assertion of its authority when threatened with concerted opposition.³³ The Bangladesh chapters, however, show the subcontinental people's decimation of their own brethren, which is all the more piteous. And Rushdie loses no opportunity to ram home the point.

The savagery of the Bangladesh war is depicted here so realistically because it is not a war against an external foe but a war with one's own people. It is basically an acknowledgement of the enormity of the error of the Partition and the manifest irony of its professed objective. As has been pointed out earlier, *Midnight's Children* is the only major Indian-English novel that deals both with the Partition of 1947 and the later division of the Islamic state of Pakistan into Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1971. As such, Rushdie's chapters dealing with this second division of the subcontinent are invested with a special significance. But the incidents in themselves are not as important as what they indicate. And they indicate, in no uncertain terms, that the very ideological basis of the Partition was wrong – that the 'glue of religion' is not always enough (as the founding fathers had thought) to keep a people together.³⁴

In this context, it is important to remember that there was a prefiguring of the Bangladesh liberation war long before it actually happened. For while the 'two-nation theory' (on the basis of which the country was partitioned in 1947) proved to be sacrosanct in the Punjab, it was chal-

lenged in East Pakistan by the historic 'Language Movement' that began soon after Independence in 1948 and culminated in the events of February 1952.³⁵ Thus, at least as far as Bengal was concerned, language proved to be a far greater defining/dividing factor than religion – something that ultimately led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. The Rabindrasangeet ('O amar Sonar Bangla') cited in Rushdie's text emphasizes just this point. The song in a way epitomizes the irony of the whole war fought ostensibly to root out subversion and keep the two wings of Pakistan united – for the occupying West Pakistani soldiers in Dacca (who were there to enforce unity) could not understand a word of the song when they heard it 'though their feet did tap inadvertently to the tune'. Here is a perfect attestation of the fact that cultural differences (in which language figures predominantly) divide much more than religion.

The idea of religion (and Partition) is evoked and interrogated further in two key passages in the novel that speak eloquently of the moral outrage of the war, and both involve the presence of a mosque. In one, the mosque (which obviously symbolizes Islam) is indifferent, and in the other it is ineffectual in stemming the rising tide of violence in the land. In one,

Shaheed was staring at a maidan in which lady doctors were being bayoneted before they were raped, and raped again before they were shot. Above them and behind them, the cool white minaret of a mosque stared blindly down upon the scene. (p. 449)

In the other, we are told that when Saleem accidentally activates a loud-speaker in a mosque, where his friend Shaheed lay with amputated legs, his screams are carried far, '... and afterwards, people would never forget how a mosque had screamed out the terrible agony of war.' (p. 451)

Religion and the ethic of violence come together in these chapters of Book III of *Midnight's Children*. In them, we see the coalescence of the essence of fundamentalist discourse and the processes of military dictatorship in undivided Pakistan. The briefing of the new recruits before their covert operations in East Pakistan and the rhetoric of their training leaves no doubt about this fact. Indeed, Sergeant Major Najmuddin's briefing of new recruits to the cutia unit is a brilliant parody of the processes of military dictatorship. The briefing happens, we are told, in 'Question-and-answer format; [where] Najmuddin provides both queries and replies [and] no interruptions are (...) tolerated' (p. 416). The young soldiers, who are so young that they 'had not had time to acquire the type of memories which give men a firm hold on reality' (p. 417), are

subjected, we are told, to rigorous training and religious programming. As the narrator says, a 'high Islamic sense of self-discipline and responsibility' is instilled in them. They are taught 'to obey unquestioningly; to seek unflaggingly; to arrest remorselessly' (p. 414) and the purpose of their training, they learn, is to root out subversive elements and traitors who challenge the country's unity.

The historical reasons behind all this are clear enough. In 1969, when General Yahya became President, Pakistan's identity was that of a young Islamic nation, born as a democracy, but which, in the twenty-two years of its existence, had already experienced more than a decade of military dictatorship. Indeed, democratic institution-building had not happened in Pakistan at all the way it had in India – which is why the polls of 1970 were so unsettling for its leaders. Pakistan and its army never had much respect for democratic procedures, which is well borne out by its political history between 1947 and 1965. What worsened the whole scenario is the subsequent collusion of two inimical forces (i.e. inimical to democracy) – fundamentalist religion and military dictatorship. Together, they created the inevitable crack of the Partition in a country that was too diverse and divided from its very inception. In this context it is pertinent to quote what the historians Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee and Aditya Mukherjee have said in their book *India After Independence*. While trying to diagnose the reasons behind the very different political trajectories of India and Pakistan since 1947, they come up with the thesis that the source of this difference actually lay in the freedom struggle movement itself. More specifically, they argue that it lay in the different ways in which the Congress and the League conducted the anticolonial movement against the British in India. According to them, the national movement as led by the Congress had, in the many decades of its functioning,

(...) succeeded in making democracy and civil liberty basic elements of the Indian political ethos. If free India could start and persist with a democratic polity, it was because the national movement had already firmly established the civil libertarian and democratic tradition among the Indian people (...). It is this tradition which explains why multi-party democracy and civil liberties have met different fates in India and Pakistan, though both equally constituted colonial India. The political party (and its politics) that brought about Pakistan was not known for its defense of civil liberties, or its functioning on democratic lines, or its tolerance towards its political opponents. Democracy was no significant part of its political culture. Besides, the national movement and its political culture were weak precisely in the areas which came to constitute Pakistan.³⁶ (2000: 23)

In the same vein, in his essay, 'The roots of religious violence in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh', Sumit Ganguly, tracing the sources of conflict in these post-colonial nations, argues that 'in polyethnic societies, ethno-religious conflict and violence is more likely when states lack a commitment to ethno-religious pluralism, to the protection of minority rights, and to democratic procedures.' This was exactly the case with Pakistan, as it showed very scant regard for these matters and ended up losing its east wing.³⁷ (2007: 71)

Indeed, in 1970, as always, Pakistan's generals were not amenable to democratic opinion at all, no matter what the poll results were. They did not expect their eastern compatriots to choose their leader, but only to acquiesce in military command. Hence, it ruthlessly set about forcing the east wing into submission after December 1970. And in true military style, it perpetrated horrific crimes, even as being the final arbiter of 'truth and untruth', it reserved for itself the right to deny its own atrocities. At one point in the narrative, Saleem says,

In the midst of the rubble of war, I discovered fair-and-unfair. Unfairness smelled like onions; the sharpness of its perfume brought tears to my eyes. Seized by the bitter aroma of injustice (...) I remembered (...) all the vast mountain of unreasonable occurrences plaguing my life. (pp. 442-443)

'Unfairness' and 'injustice' are inextricably linked with war, any war, but the civil war that led to the division of Pakistan witnessed an extreme version of that. And nowhere is it more transparent than in the official denial of the west wing's covert operations in Dacca in the spring of 1971. On being quizzed about his army's special canine units, the Pakistani General (Tiger) tells his old friend and Indian counterpart (Sam)³⁸ that he had 'never heard of it' and actually found the whole idea 'damn ridiculous' (p. 453)³⁹. In this context, it may be remembered that for seven months, cutia unit 22 (comprising Ayooba, Farooq, Shaheed and Saleem) had 'vanished off the face of the war' (p. 440), living in a realm outside space and time. The Sunderbans was a phantasmagoric experience for the boy soldiers which they could not pin down to reality. But the funny thing is that even their actual war experiences in Dacca are made to be unreal by their General's denial of the very existence of their canine units.

Talking about the Sunderbans, it may be noted that it figures in just one chapter of this voluminous novel of thirty. And yet, it is a very significant one – not only because it is one of the most magical/fantastic parts of a book known/celebrated for its use of magic realism, but also because Saleem and his comrades' experience in the forest is an integral part of the narrative of the 1971 War in *Midnight's Children*.

'In the Sunderbans' happens to be the longest of the three chapters in Book III to deal with the Liberation War, and primarily has the function of making the boy soldiers own up to their guilt, take responsibility for their crimes and be punished for committing them; and also to initiate them into adulthood. It is a surreal experience that apparently had to happen, because, according to the author, the war-weary boy soldiers had entered '(...) that condition of the spirit in which the consequences of acceptance could not be denied, in which an overdose of reality gave birth to a miasmatic longing for flight into the safety of dreams' (p. 431). This flight is nothing but their adolescent attempt to escape from a gnawing sense of 'wrong-doing' by deserting 'into the historyless anonymity of rainforests' (p. 360). As Abdulrazak Gurnah has observed, 'The Sunderbans episode is a trope of the epic form, because it is through this descent that Saleem (...) and the Pakistani soldiers with him see through the national myth that had obscured their sense of responsibility as human beings' (Gurnah 2007: 102)⁴⁰.

An almost identical situation can be found in Sorayya Khan's *Noor*⁴¹, where a Pakistani war veteran, confronted with unusual paintings that reminded him of the civil war of 1971, is forced to admit to himself that he had '(...) not only witnessed but partook in the willful devastation of a people, the Bengalis, for reasons of national consolidation that he no longer – if ever – believed in'.⁴²

Noor, written more than two decades after *Midnight's Children*, tells the story of the 1971 civil war, of the deafening silences that surround it, of Pakistani attempts to forget it, and of the possibilities of redemption. It is a remarkable debut work and breaks a long literary silence by being the first Pakistani English novel to focus on East Pakistan during the war of 1971⁴³ and come to terms with its brutality. Set in modern-day Islamabad, Pakistan, the book tells a powerful and poignant story of an extraordinary child, Noor, who, through her paintings and drawings, enables her mother, Sajida, and her grandfather, Ali, to confront the pasts they have chosen to suppress. Her paintings (that change from abstractions to realistic depictions as the novel progresses) bring their haunted memories to the fore – memories of the 1970 cyclone (which had orphaned her East Bengali mother) and the violent atrocities of the 1971 war (in which her West Pakistani foster grandfather had participated as a soldier). Her artwork thus becomes the central means through which the novel excavates individual and collective memories.

Rushdie and Ghosh

Rushdie's novel was the first Partition novel to be published in the decade of the 1980s, and, as in so many other ways, it also ushered in a

change in the depiction of the Partition in Indian-English fiction. When we compare *Midnight's Children* to some of the earlier Partition novels (discussed in Chapter II), we discern a palpable shift from something akin to direct reportage to a more distinct theoretical accent. This is because, by the time we come to Rushdie, it is no longer enough to just speak of the immediate physical consequences of the Partition – the mass migration and communal violence, which were the defining features of the times; or even to dissect what went wrong with the nationalist movement. The positioning of the novelist in a vantage point in history now afforded him perspectives that were not possible before. For writers of the post-Partition generation like Rushdie, the midnight hour of 15 August thus becomes a site to explore ideas about nationhood, to ask questions like: Who/What constitutes a nation? What is its basis? What kind of a nation has India created? How did it come about? Is it uniform? Through the figure of Saleem, Rushdie invokes these questions in *Midnight's Children*. But not only this, for the shift in emphases signalled by Rushdie came to be continued through the decade of the 1980s, and these new concerns in *Midnight's Children* were extended and explored more deeply by Amitav Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines*, a novel that will be discussed in the next chapter.

4 Imagined communities: Questioning the border

Proust and the anti-Sikh riots

The title of Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines*¹ is reminiscent of the title of Joseph Conrad's *The Shadow-Line*², but it is clear enough that Ghosh did not draw upon Conrad's book while writing his defining and most popular piece of fiction to date. His sources lay elsewhere, and they could not have been more divergent. As acknowledged by the author himself, there were two principal inspirations behind *The Shadow Lines*, one political and the other literary, of which the first shaped its content, and the other determined its form. These were the 1984 Delhi riots following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguard; and Michel Proust's masterpiece *In Remembrance of Things Past*.³

Ghosh himself has written eloquently on the first in more than one essay. He refers to it in passing in his essay 'The Greatest Sorrow', where he says, 'The violence [of the 1984 riots] had the effect of bringing to the surface of my memory events from my own childhood, when I had indeed been in a similar situation' (2002: 314)⁴. But the essay where he talks at length about his 1984 experiences in Delhi (when he was teaching at Delhi University and completing his first novel, *The Circle of Reason*) is one entitled 'The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi'. It was a defining moment in his life, Ghosh tells us, when he was faced with a difficult choice. He had to, he says, 'resolve a dilemma, between being a writer and being a citizen.' He chose the first, and out of the crucible of that realization *The Shadow Lines* was born. As he goes on to write: '(...) *The Shadow Lines* (...) became a book not about any one event but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them' (2002: 60, 61)⁵. About Proust's book and its influence on his second novel, he has recently said in an interview with the critic John C. Hawley:

(...) Proust's influence on *The Shadow Lines* is clearly evident (...) it was in deference to Proust that the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* was left unnamed. But Proust's influence is evident also in the ways in which time and space are collapsed in the narrative

of *The Shadow Lines*. I remember that at the time my ambition was to do with space what Proust had done with time: that is, to make completely different instances of a continuum immanent in each other.⁶ (2005: 8-9)

Midnight's Children and The Shadow Lines

As a novelist, Ghosh was successful enough in his ambition to win the Sahitya Academy Award⁷ in 1989 for *The Shadow Lines*. And though coming a full seven years after Salman Rushdie's Booker Prize-winning novel, *Midnight's Children*, *The Shadow Lines* shares quite a few concerns with it. Foremost among them is the theme of the Partition itself (though this is not apparent at first), and, as a kind of natural corollary to it, the concept of 'nation' as an imagined community. But, of course, Ghosh's novel is set in a radically different universe from that of Rushdie; and unlike Rushdie's protagonist, Ghosh's protagonist inhabits a very different milieu and is a member not of a minority but rather the majority community in India. Again, while Rushdie's novel covers the history of the subcontinent from 1915 to 1977, Ghosh's novel traverses time and space far more extensively, its locales being spread over three continents and its events focused on three chunks of time – London during the Second World War Blitz; Calcutta and Dhaka in the 1960s and 1970s; and then again London of the 1980s. From the 1960s to the 1980s it covers the childhood, adolescence and young adulthood of the protagonist, as well as the life of the protagonist's beloved uncle from the 1940s to the 1960s.

Four ways to read the novel

It is important to note that *The Shadow Lines* can be read in at least four ways. It is first the story of a person coming to terms with an irrevocable loss⁸ (the death of a beloved uncle in a communal riot), trying to make sense of and understand what happened years ago when he was a child. Seen in this way, it is a novel about growth and maturity, a type of *Bildungsroman*. Secondly, it may be regarded as a story about the Partition and its aftermath, since the novel reveals the great potency and power of such destructive forces as religious fundamentalism and the mindless violence that it can unleash – which is all an enduring legacy of the Partition. At another level, however, *The Shadow Lines* is a novel that questions whether states can be geo-politically defined; whether the socio-political shadow line that we draw between people has any validity by itself, or whether it is an absurd illusion. In other words, the novel

explores the relationship between the modern nation state and its denizens, and it exposes the limits of that relationship. But this is not all as Ghosh's fiction may also be seen as a text that questions the established narrative of the Indian nation and attempts to recover a piece of its lost history – a riot in 1964 that was drowned in silence. Seen from this point of view, the novel's concern seems more with historiography than history. Indeed, *The Shadow Lines* dramatizes what Milan Kundera says in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: 'the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting'.⁹ In this instance, the novelist pits the memory of a riot against the documented history of a war.

Of borders and lost histories

Most of the novels that have been discussed in this study deal with what went before and/or immediately after the Partition. Ghosh, on the other hand, focuses exclusively on the aftermath of the Partition in *The Shadow Lines* – and therefore, quite inevitably, goes much beyond the depiction of the 'event' that constituted the Partition. In fact, in *The Shadow Lines*, the Partition becomes the locus for the exploration of larger political concepts like 'freedom' and 'nationalism', and for an interrogation of the concept of a 'border'. On the question of borders, Ghosh is on record as having said:

What interested me first about borders was their arbitrariness, their constructedness – the ways in which they are 'naturalized' by modern political mythmaking. I think this interest arose because of some kind of inborn distrust of anything that appears to be 'given' or taken-for-granted (...). I think these lines are drawn in order to manipulate our ways of thought: that is why they must be disregarded. (2005: 8-9)¹⁰

However, it is important to remember here that *The Shadow Lines* is not the only novel of Ghosh's to deal with borders. The notion of a borderless universe is clearly something that preoccupied Amitav Ghosh from his very first novel, *The Circle of Reason* (1986). If studied in detail, it will be seen that his repertoire represents a continual attempt to explore the connections between different people and places in widely divergent spatial and temporal settings. Ghosh's is an essentially idealistic vision of a world without borders – the emblems of which in *The Shadow Lines* happen to be the atlas and the story of Tristan, which are what Tridib bequeaths to his nephew.¹¹ 'Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and eyes to see them with,' avers the narrator very early on in

the novel. In its essence, Tridib's legacy was a particular vision of the world where the shadow lines that connected people were infinitely more significant than the ones that divided them.

Integrally related to Ghosh's passionate appeal for a borderless universe is another issue. If we take Amitav Ghosh's oeuvre as a whole, we will see that one of his fundamental preoccupations as a writer (of both fiction and non-fiction) has been to recover lost histories. Be it the story of Bomma in *The Slave of MS. H.6*¹², a piece that was originally a part of his doctoral dissertation (which later became the book *In an Antique Land*¹³ and was also included in Volume VII of *Subaltern Studies*)¹⁴; or the lost art of the Cambodian dancers in *Dancing in Cambodia* (1998)¹⁵; or the practically unknown history of the reign of the last Burmese King, Thebaw in *The Glass Palace* (2000)¹⁶, his aim has always been to make the forgotten histories of defeated people and subjugated cultures visible to the world. It is noticeable too that the same impulse was at work when Ghosh wrote about his own country, India. *Countdown* (1999)¹⁷, for example, tells the story of the aftermath of the Pokhran nuclear explosion in Khetoloi, an unknown village on the border of India and Pakistan, where the experiment was conducted. In *The Hungry Tide* (2004)¹⁸, he not only uncovers the suppressed history of the desperately poor and wretched refugees of Morichjhapi who were massacred by the West Bengal Government in 1979, but also intersperses it with the forgotten history of the Irrawady dolphins (*Oraceaalla brevirostris*) of the Sunderbans.¹⁹ His latest novel, the 2008 Booker-nominated *Sea of Poppies* (which is the first part of the 'Ibis trilogy'), uncovers yet another silenced history of the subcontinent, this time with regard to British imperialism. The novel is set against the backdrop of the first Opium War with China in the mid-nineteenth century and delves deep into the fiercely exploitative nature of the British opium trade in Asia.²⁰

***The Shadow Lines* and the aftermath of the Partition**

Both the concerns of Ghosh enumerated above – i.e. his appeal for a borderless universe and his penchant for recovering lost histories come together in *The Shadow Lines*. On the face of it, *The Shadow Lines* has little to do with the Partition. But this is to ignore the central incident of the novel – Tridib's death – which can be read as a far-reaching consequence of this long-ago event of 1947. The death of Tridib indeed indicates that the aftermath of the Partition did not die down even after seventeen years, and that even if it is a remote and quite insignificant (from a newsworthy point of view) an incident, it highlights the destructive energies of religious fundamentalism. And quite significantly, it is the remoteness and apparent political insignificance of this central inci-

dent that ironically enables the novel to make its statement all the more powerfully.

The incident of Tridib, Jethamoshai and Khalil's death in a riot in Dhaka in January 1964 was certainly not a happening of national importance. Rather, as Ghosh indicates in his text, Tridib's murder in Dhaka was only a personal loss to the protagonist – a most sudden and abrupt loss, which he never lives down. But what is interesting is the way Ghosh shows how this tragic incident was actually a deeply ironic off-shoot of something that happened on the subcontinent in the previous week. Towards the end of the novel we are provided with the historic information that on 27 December 1963, the Mui-Mubarak, a sacred relic, believed to be the hair of the Prophet Mohammad himself, was stolen from the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar. Summarizing a newspaper report that he had examined in the Teen Murti House library in New Delhi, the narrator tells us that the whole nation was shocked and outraged at the theft, and there were numerous protest demonstrations in Kashmir. Yet, the narrator notes that the remarkable thing about these demonstrations was that there were no reported incidents of violence between Hindus and Muslims in the Kashmir valley. Indeed, while Pakistan indulged in its customary inflammatory remarks, India helped out in the search. Then, with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) intervening, the relic was found. However, the narrator pointedly observes that in a most curious twist of events, while Kashmir celebrated the recovery of the relic, riots flared up in Dhaka and Khulna in the distant east wing of Pakistan, and then in Calcutta in India. Thus, Ghosh shows us how an incident in Srinagar triggered off a series of incidents of communal violence in different (and far-flung) parts of the subcontinent.²¹

In terms of the story told in *The Shadow Lines*, in one of these riots in Dhaka, on 9 January 1964, a young man fell victim to mob fury. This young man, Tridib, had gone there to bring back a granduncle to Calcutta and was accompanied by his loved ones. He was killed ironically in the very lane where his mother was brought up and spent the whole of her maiden life, but the exact circumstances of his death are not immediately revealed in the text. Exactly *how* Tridib died and *why* are the questions that are situated at the very heart of the narrative. In fact, it can be said that these are the two questions that the novel primarily explores.

Tridib, the man who is at the centre of Ghosh's story, is an endearing figure who subsumed many roles in his personality with equal élan. He is a loving brother and son, an affectionate nephew, a lover and a beloved uncle. Evidently, his death affected all these people to whom he was related and became an incident that was indelibly imprinted on their minds. But the person whose very life became defined by this inci-

dent was his nephew (the protagonist of the novel), who was not present at the time of his death. Tridib is the narrator-protagonist's idol, the person with whom he completely identified himself and 'with whose life he is preoccupied to the point of obsession'²². Indeed, the narrator's intensely imaginative inner life is, for him, Tridib's lasting legacy. As he says in the novel, 'Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and eyes to see them with.' But not just that, for as Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan has rightly pointed out, 'His entire adult life is later played out at the level of loving imitation, even surrogacy: he sees through Tridib's eyes, studies history like Tridib does, thinks Tridib's thoughts, and finally loves Tridib's lover' (2002: 296)²³.

Tridib's loss thus leaves a void in his life, rendered more intense by the mystery that surrounded his death. The protagonist's search for the truth of Tridib's death, in fact, constitutes the crux of the novel, but the truth is revealed to him only sporadically over a period of almost two decades. As the novel sets out, Tridib dies on 4 January 1964. The protagonist, who is then an eight-year old child, comes to know of his death only a few days later, and then he is told by his father that it was an accident. The very next year, in 1965, during the Indo-China war, when Thamma, his grandmother, is hysterical and donates her last bit of jewellery to the war fund, his mother blurts out that she had been like that ever since Tridib's murder. That Tridib was murdered comes as a revelation to the boy. Fifteen years later, in 1979, when the narrator is a college student in Delhi, a chance remark by a friend (Malik) sparks off a debate about the riots of 1963 in Khulna, Dhaka and Calcutta. It is at this point that he is granted an epiphanic realization, as following his scanning of newspaper reports to try and discover how Tridib died, he realizes that while Tridib was being murdered in Dhaka, he too had undergone a disturbing experience of a communal nature in Calcutta. Communal disharmony had disfigured the faces of the two cities of Dhaka and Calcutta simultaneously. As Ghosh makes his protagonist put it, it was a time when 'each city was the inverted image of the other'. (p. 233). Another two years later, i.e. in 1981, precisely seventeen years after Tridib's death, when on a year's fellowship as a research student in London, the protagonist finally comes to know exactly what happened to Tridib from two eyewitness accounts – that of Robi and May. For Robi, Tridib's brother, it is a nightmare from which there is no deliverance; for May, the English girl Tridib had fallen in love with, it is an acknowledgement of her own guilt that leads her on to intensive soul-searching.

This is how the protagonist comes to know of Tridib's death in bits and pieces over a period of seventeen years. His search for the truth behind Tridib's death constitutes an agonizing experience for the narrator, and Ghosh introduces a great deal of suspense in his presentation of

this search. Many indirect comments throughout the novel lead up to the actual statement which is expressed in no more than three bland lines at the end of the novel: 'When I got there I saw three bodies. They were all dead. They'd cut Khalil's stomach open. The old man's head had been hacked off. And they'd cut Tridib's throat from ear to ear' (p. 251).

To unearth the circumstances of Tridib's death entails for the narrator a seventeen-year-long search. But this does not in itself explain why it happened. There are actually two facets to the question as to why Tridib died – the first is about why the incident took place; and the second, about why Tridib voluntarily threw himself in the midst of a blood-thirsty mob to save two other lives. To consider the second aspect first, it is self-evident from the thrust of Ghosh's narrative that Tridib threw himself because May goaded him to do so. For years, May later tells the protagonist, she held herself responsible for the whole happening. She used to think that 'she had killed Tridib by imposing her liberal values on a cultural situation she didn't understand'.²⁴ But later she realized that she had been wrong, for as she says, Tridib

(...) must have known that he was going to die... I was arrogant enough to think I owed him his life. But I know now that I didn't kill him; I couldn't have if I had wanted. He gave himself up; it was a sacrifice. I know I can't understand it, I know I musn't try, for any real sacrifice is a mystery. (pp. 251-252)

In his text, however, Ghosh makes it clear that Tridib's death was no 'mystery'. It is merely May's belated excuse to exorcize herself of the guilt that had plagued her for seventeen long years. As the narrative shows it, she was definitely responsible for Tridib's death, for it was she who had goaded him into it. It was only when she stubbornly left the safety of the car to face the Muslim mob that Tridib got out of the car, too. She had taunted the Datta-Chaudhuris with a charge of hypocrisy since she just could not accept the fact that they could so mercilessly leave Jethamoshai, Tridib's granduncle, at the mercy of a bloodthirsty mob, the very same old man they had come all the way from Calcutta to rescue. Indeed, if Tridib had stayed back, probably nothing would have happened to him or anyone else in the car. The mob would have been temporarily satisfied with the old man's blood and been quite happy to get Khalil as bonus. But Tridib would have lost May's esteem had he done so. Since this was of far greater value to him than his life, it was a loss he could not have lived with. In fact, it is clear that he did not go out to save May, for then he would have brought her back to the car. Instead, he pushed her aside and went ahead and hurled himself into the mob to prove that he was not a coward. Only, as May remarked

years later, she had no idea at that time of what she was doing then. She came to understand only much later why Mayadebi had said, 'You will get us all killed'.

There can be little doubt that Westerners cannot fully comprehend the complexities of Asian political realities, brought up as they are on Western notions of liberal democracy. A comparable example would be that of Priscilla Hart in Shashi Tharoor's profoundly provocative novel *Riot*.²⁵ Priscilla is an American NGO worker who comes to India to do fieldwork in a remote district of Uttar Pradesh and loses her life most tragically at the hands of Hindu goons precisely because she refuses to understand that her American notions of right and wrong cannot work in a back-of-beyond hole in India. Her case is a very good illustration of the fact that Western concepts are seldom tailor-made to solve the problems of the East, especially in a democracy like India. Within Ghosh's own oeuvre, Piya, the cetologist in *The Hungry Tide* (who has been brought up in the United States) acts in a similar way in the Sunderbans when she objects to the killing of a tiger that had been causing havoc in a village. Without understanding the desperation of the villagers, she tries to single-handedly stop them and has to be dragged away from the angry mob by Fokir and Horen. As Hawley rightly points out: '[She is] reminiscent of May Price in the face of the Dhaka mob in *The Shadow Lines*, and like May, she is oblivious to the danger in which she is putting everyone by romantically standing before a "force of nature" (2005: 139)²⁶.

Why Tribib got killed in Jindabahr Lane

While discussing Tridib's death, however, what is more important is the first facet of the question as to why he died – namely, why that violent incident in Dhaka's Jindabahr Lane took place at all. And the exploration of this raises certain other issues in the novel, particularly the issue of the unique political reality existing on the Indian subcontinent, post-1947. The two new states of India and Pakistan came into being as a result of a division on the basis of religion and were demarcated by arbitrary borders, borders that were etched all too hastily by an Englishman who knew very little of the land he was commissioned to divide.²⁷ The drawing of the borders, however, did not end the communal problem it was meant to solve, but ironically only aggravated it. For, as a result of the perpetual hostility between these states that were once part of a single nation, frequent communal disturbances invariably followed on the basis of a majority-minority religious polarity. The fact that the majority in one state was the minority in the other undermined, too, the very

possibility of there existing anything like a coherent nationalism in any part of the subcontinent.²⁸

Of course, it must be admitted that such a broad, all-encompassing political concept like nationalism has no uniform definition, and even political theorists have interpreted it from varying perspectives.²⁹ In the novel itself, we find two versions, the first a brand of nationalism, current during the first half of the twentieth century, which Thamma passionately believes in; and the other, a very different concept which the narrator enunciates in the course of the novel. The narrator remembers his grandmother as someone bigger than life, a bubbling cauldron of nationalist fervour. As Suvir Kaul rightly says, Thamma in the novel is 'the exemplar of militant nationalism (...) [a woman] who had lived the nationalist dream and experienced the setbacks and successes that gave it its character'.³⁰ Subscribing to a view of freedom forged in the crucible of violent anticolonial struggle, Thamma, as is made very clear in the text, 'sees national identities not in terms of imagined communities, but as a deeply rooted connectedness to a place borne out of the blood sacrifices of generations'.³¹

All this is supported by what we are told about Thamma in the novel. In her youth in Dhaka, we are told, she had wanted to be a part of a terrorist group and serve the motherland in some way during the struggle for independence. Later, when she is an old woman, she is severely critical of Ila, her niece, who chose to stay back in London alone 'only because she wanted to be free' (p. 89). According to Thamma, Ila has no right to live there, for as Jon Mee observes, 'she sees England no less than India as a place that belongs only to those who have this kind of visceral relationship to the land'.³² Besides, as the narrator remarks at this point, his grandmother had 'nothing but contempt for a freedom that could be bought for the price of an air-ticket. For she too had once wanted to be free; she had dreamt of killing for her freedom' (p. 89). Again, during the Indo-China war of 1965, when her grandson asks her why she gave away her last bit of jewellery, she screams out her motive:

I gave it away... I gave it to the fund for the war. I had to, don't you see? For your sake; for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out (...). This is the only chance, she cried, her voice rising to a screech. The only one. We are fighting them properly at last, with tanks and guns and bombs.³³ [And then, when her hands were bleeding] (...). I must get to the hospital, she said to herself, perfectly calm now. I musn't waste all this blood. I can donate it to the war fund. (p. 237)

This hysterical response shows how deeply steeped Thamma is in the nationalist rhetoric, and this proves Anjali Gera's point that 'till the end, she remains imprisoned in the myth of the nation'³⁴. Yet it is important to note that *The Shadow Lines* questions this idea of a nationhood consolidated through the baptism of wars. Certainly, as Meenakshi Mukherjee perceptively notes, 'Thamma does not fall outside the novel's inclusive ambit of sympathy; the author allows her historical position to confer a certain inevitability to her ideology'.³⁵ But Ghosh nevertheless prioritizes a very different notion of nationalism, since what he very persuasively puts forward, albeit through his protagonist, is that nationalism needs to be redefined in the present global context; for nationalism, in the sense Thamma understood it, is often a source of violence. Through the narrative of his novel, Ghosh indeed questions whether nations can be geo-politically defined at all. As he shows in *The Shadow Lines*, the borders that are supposed to divide nations are often shadowy, arbitrary and illusive. The whole incident of Tridib's death as set out in the novel attests to this fact.

In order to understand this, it is necessary here to look back upon the chain of events set out in the novel after the mention of Tridib's death. The riot in Dhaka, we are told, had sparked off a riot in Calcutta the very next day, just as it had itself been sparked off by a riot in Khulna. The protagonist had had the fearful experience of having his school bus attacked and pursued by a mob of frenzied Muslims. Though nothing overtly violent had occurred, this incident had shaken and even terrified him. Earlier in the day, he had already had a disturbing experience, when he was forced to disown his Muslim friend and when all his bus mates had drained their water bottles, acting on the rumour that the Tala Tank (the city's principal water supply) had been poisoned by the city's Muslims in retaliation for '(...) that familiar old rumour, the harbinger of every serious riot – that the trains from Pakistan were arriving packed with corpses' (p. 228).

This story of communal violence, of retaliation setting off counter-retaliation, of rumours sparking off riots, is of course familiar from the other novels examined so far. But the point that Ghosh obviously underlines is the mystery of why an incident that took place in Srinagar in India sparked off riots in distant Khulna and Dhaka in East Pakistan, and then was mirrored in communal violence in Calcutta, a metropolis in a different nation. The protagonist tries to figure out this mystery, and it is while toying with Tridib's old copy of Bartholomew's Atlas that he is granted an epiphanic insight. Taking 1200 miles (i.e. the distance between Khulna and Srinagar) as radius, he draws a circle first in a map of Asia and then of Europe. He finds the first circle a 'remarkable' one, as 'more than half of mankind seemed to have fallen within it' (p. 232). But more pertinently, this circle in Asia reveals to him the paradox of

physical proximity and a completely contrary sense of differences in national identity. As the narrator says,

Tridib's atlas showed me, for example, that within the tidy ordering of Euclidean space, Chiang Mai in Thailand was much nearer Calcutta than Delhi is, that Chengdu in China is nearer than Srinagar is. Yet (...) did the people of Khulna care at all about the fate of the mosques in Vietnam and South China (a mere stone's throw away)? I doubted it. But in this other direction, it took no more than a week [for a riot to flare up].

The reality of the other circle inscribed in a map of Europe (this time with Milan as centre and again with 1200 miles as radius) was very different, however. As the narrator observes about this second circle:

I tried to imagine an event, any event that might occur in a city near the periphery of that circle... Stockholm, Dublin, Casablanca, Alexandria, Istanbul, Kiev... which would bring the people of Milan pouring out into the streets. I tried hard, but I could think of none.

None, that is, other than war.

It seemed to me then that within this circle [unlike the other one] there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all.

Then, he turns back to the first circle and concludes:

I was struck with wonder that there had really been a time, not so long ago, when people, sensible people, of good intentions, had thought that all maps were the same, that there was a special enchantment in lines.

They had drawn their borders, ... hoping perhaps that once they had etched their border upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the ancient Gondwanaland. What had they felt, I wonder, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet-undiscovered irony – the irony that killed Tridib: the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines. (p. 233)

This passage, towards the end of the novel, clearly enunciates Ghosh's political position, which is ideologically a very a-political one. What he

highlights here is the fact that borders are illusive, and that they defeat and negate the very reason behind their existence.

Meaninglessness of borders – colonial and post-colonial perspectives of the nation

There are three passages in the novel that speak eloquently on the meaninglessness of borders, and these figure in diverse sections, spread out over 150 pages of the text. The first is located in a context in which we are told that before flying to Bangladesh, Thamma is very disturbed to realize that her place of birth (Dhaka, in Bangladesh) is mesily at odds with her nationality (Indian). Further on, in her conversation with her son, she is told that the 'border' is not on the frontier, but right inside the airport. This is too much for her to comprehend. She cannot believe that there are no external marks to demarcate the border between the two countries. Quite out of her wits, she asks her son:

But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean where's the difference then? And if there's no difference, both sides will be the same: it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then – partition and all the killing and everything – if there isn't something in between? (p. 151)

The second reflection on borders is provided by Thamma's senile old Jethamoshai, who was the chief reason behind her Dhaka visit, and who quite surprisingly, provides a very refreshingly different perspective on the Partition. When people insist that he must leave Dhaka and accompany his extended family who have come to fetch him all the way from Calcutta, he (as Suvir Kaul notes) 'like another more-than-sane literary character, Sadaat Hassan Manto's Toba Tek Singh'³⁶ simply refuses to leave and says:

I know everything, I understand everything. Once you start moving you never stop. That's what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don't believe in this India-Shindia. It is all very well, you are going away now, but suppose when you get here they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I will die here. (p. 215)

Jethamoshai's words incidentally remind one of Nirmal's poignant response to the defiance of the Morichjhapi settlers in the face of government repression in Ghosh's novel, *The Hungry Tide*. Listening to them crying out 'Amra kara, bastuhara/ Morichjhapi chharbona', ('Who are we? The homeless. We won't leave Morichjhapi'), he says, 'Where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave' (2004: 254)³⁷.

Something of Jethamoshai's sentiment is echoed by Robi fifteen years after he heard it spoken out. He had been a mere slip of a boy then; fifteen years later, while he relates his version of Tridib's death to the protagonist in London, he is an Indian Administrative Service officer, with first-hand knowledge of many riots and communal disturbances on the subcontinent. He muses on the word 'freedom', since the root of all problems seemed to lie there.

Free, he said laughing. You know, if you look at the pictures on the front pages of the newspapers at home now, all those pictures of dead people – in Assam, the north east, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura – people shot by terrorists and separatists and the army and the police, you will find somewhere behind it all, that single word; everyone's doing it to be free (...). I think to myself why don't they draw thousands of little lines through the whole sub-continent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory? (pp. 246-247)

What is important to note here is that the above three viewpoints about borders are provided by three characters belonging to three contiguous generations as figured in *The Shadow Lines*. The first is spoken by Thamma, the protagonist's grandmother; the second by her uncle, Jethamoshai (i.e. the protagonist's granduncle); and the third by Robi, Thamma's nephew, who is roughly the same age as the protagonist and is his friend. Jethamoshai had lived in a world where borders were not of paramount importance, and what was regarded as important was one's sense of belonging to the place one was born and brought up in. Hence, the tone of finality in his concluding remark, 'As for me, I was born here, and I will die here.' He does not believe in arbitrary lines and is shrewd enough to realize that once a man started to move, there would be no end to it. His words also appear to be prophetic, for within less than a decade of their utterance, in 1971, East Pakistan became Bangladesh. Rather differently, Grandma, the second character to muse on borders, grew up in the momentous opening decades of the twentieth century, i.e. in the heyday of the anticolonial struggle against the British rule in India. Struggle was the most formative of her experiences, something that defined her worldview, and Ghosh's narrative

makes it clear that though she had not literally participated in the nationalist movement, the spirit of the times had entered her soul and contributed to the creation of her own perception of self. Different, again, is the third speaker on borders, Robi, who as an individual belonging to a post-Partition generation, and having an intimate knowledge of the communally coloured disturbances that rent the national fabric of India, notes how freedom seemed to lie at the very root of all the subcontinent's problems. As Ghosh narrativizes it, Robi's response is much more philosophical than his elders' to the whole issue of borders and nationhood.

As already pointed out, the three characters of Jethamoshai, Thamma and Robi not only belong to three contiguous generations in the novel, but they belong to eras both colonial and post-colonial. Hence, one of the most interesting aspects of *The Shadow Lines* is that it gives us representations of ideas about the 'nation' in both colonial and post-colonial times. And ultimately it falls to the narrator in the novel to assimilate all the earlier perspectives projected about borders and nationhood. Through him, Ghosh emphasizes the fact that it is impossible to live by the notions that had sustained an earlier generation. In fact, what Ghosh further points to here is the concept of nation as an 'imagined community'. For Ghosh's conceptualization of the world is reminiscent of the conclusions of Benedict Anderson about nationhood in his seminal work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.³⁸

Imagined communities

Partha Chatterjee sums up the basic contention of Anderson's book as follows:

In this book, Anderson demonstrates with much subtlety and originality, that nations are not the determinate products of given sociological conditions such as language or race or religion; and that they have been, in Europe and everywhere else in the world, imagined into existence. Anderson further describes some of the major institutional forms through which this imagined community came to acquire concrete shape, especially the institutions of what he so ingeniously calls 'print-capitalism'. He then argues that the historical experience of nationalism in Western Europe, in the Americas, and in Russia has supplied for all subsequent nationalisms a set of modular forms from which nationalist elites in Asia and Africa have chosen the ones they liked. (1999: 5)

Chatterjee concludes that ‘Anderson’s book has been (...) the most influential in the last few years [i.e. the 1980s/1990s] in generating new theoretical ideas on nationalism’³⁹. (1999: 5) But it is not only social scientists who have accorded a signal position to Anderson’s work, for even literary critics like Anjali Gera have pointed out the impact of Anderson’s book on Indian historians and writers alike:

Following Anderson’s idea of ‘nations’ as ‘imagined communities’, the nation, along with other ‘narratives’, has been rigorously investigated in post-colonial discourse in the last two decades. This contestation is most directly addressed in the works of the Subaltern Studies group and the historiographic fiction of Rushdie, Ghosh and others.⁴⁰

Undoubtedly, among Indian writers in English, it was Salman Rushdie who first addressed this question of what constitutes a ‘nation’ at some length in his work, both fiction and non-fiction. In *Imaginary Homelands*, for example, in an essay written on the fortieth anniversary of Indian independence, he raises the fundamental question, ‘Does India exist?’ He unravels this riddle through the central metaphor of a nation’s birth in *Midnight’s Children*. In the novel he emphasizes the ‘imaginary’ nature of the newly created nation in a famous key passage in the final chapter of Book I, entitled ‘Tick, Tock’. The narrator, Saleem Sinai, commenting on the momentous event of Indian Independence says here:

(...) a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, (...) was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream. (1980: 112)

But as has been noted in Chapter III, this was written in 1980 and clearly anticipates what Anderson was to say in *Imagined Communities* three years later.

Ghosh, as erudite a scholar as he is an eminent novelist, obviously seems to have been influenced by the new ideas of nationalism that were in circulation in academia as well as literary circles in the 1980s, towards the end of which *The Shadow Lines* was written. In fact, as A.N. Kaul points out,

In viewing nationalism as both an invention and a force for destruction, Ghosh had put himself alongside a considerable num-

ber of modern western scholars ranging from Elie Kedourie and Hans Kohn to Tom Nairn and Benedict Anderson. (2002: 301)⁴¹

Anjali Gera, similarly, draws our attention to the palpable influence of another eminent political thinker, Ernest Gellner, on Ghosh's novel. According to her, 'Ghosh's emphasis on the "invented" nature of places echoes Ernest Gellner's reading of nations almost verbatim; "a place does not merely exist, (...) it has to be invented in one's imagination" ' (2003: 110-111)⁴².

Warring critics, and an author in denial

But while critics are united in pointing out the possible political sources of Ghosh's novel, they appear not to agree on the significance of Ghosh's central point in *The Shadow Lines*. On the one end of the spectrum, for example, we have Robert Dixon, who, in his excellent study of several of Ghosh's works, notes that *The Shadow Lines* is '(...) a fictional critique of classical anthropology's model of discrete cultures and the associated ideology of nationalism'⁴³ (2003: 20). On the other end, we find A.N. Kaul, who, in what amounts to a stinging denunciation of Ghosh's idealistic vision, says

Shadow Lines is a metaphor for evading rather than exploring political realities. For if the happenings of Dhaka prove anything, they prove precisely that war or friendship between nations is a continuing political reality.⁴⁴(1995: 303)

Somewhere in between the above judgements about the novel is Jon Mee's opinion. While Mee does not exactly share Dixon's point of view, he also disagrees with Kaul. Pointing out that Kaul's major problem with Ghosh's novel is due to Ghosh's valorizing of the imaginative faculty, Mee argues that Kaul is wrong in making Ghosh's use of the word 'imagination' co-extensive with the English Romantic ideal. As he argues:

Kaul may be too quick to read the western literary history of the word imagination into *The Shadow Lines*. After all, Tridib actively seeks to train the narrator to use imagination in a particular kind of way. Kaul's critique seems to ignore the anthropological nature of the imagination explored in the novel. Tridib's mind, for instance, delights in the specificities of material culture rather than 'fairy tales'.⁴⁵ (2003: 100)

It is interesting to note here that though most critics and readers take the political element in his work to be a given, Ghosh himself denies it. But there is clearly a contradiction between the manifest intentions of Ghosh's novels on the one hand and his public disavowal of an overt political stand on the other. What he writes and what he speaks do not seem to match. In an interview he said,

I'm not interested in speaking for anyone or creating a kind of political vision which will supplant other political visions. I mean, there are things in politics that I don't like. Obviously I hate these fundamentalists, I hate extreme nationalism (...) and I suppose that emerges from my work (...) but I don't see myself as political. I would go even further and say that I don't think it's particularly interesting to write about politics.⁴⁶

Many critics have not taken kindly to such statements. In this respect, Brinda Bose's very forthright observation on Ghosh's denials merits attention. In the 'Introduction' to her edited book, *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives* (2003), she says:

Such pronouncements ('(...) history, the kind of history exploring causes, causality, is of no interest to me') – along with his avowal, 'By instinct I'm non-political', that has, understandably, dismayed a huge number of his readers (...) amounts to something of an insult to those who particularly appreciate his keen understanding – and rendering – of the political, historical, sociological and cultural nuances of his subjects, and believe that it is this sensibility that sets him apart from the clutch of Indian novelists in English that are springing from the woodwork ever since Rushdie immortalized the genre.⁴⁷ (2003: 18)

Anshuman Mondal, similarly, is of the opinion that:

The striking interdisciplinarity of his [Ghosh's] work and its close relation to academic debates about the nature of knowledge that have taken shape in the latter decades of the 20th century – in other words, to 'critical theory' – is obvious, notwithstanding his own disaffiliation from it. Despite his denials, such links to current thinking in the academy are an important dimension of his work and one that gives his writing an intellectual rigour and substance that his contemporaries can seldom match. What really sets him apart from much academic discourse is the accessibility of his work, the ways in which his intellectualism is worn lightly on the fabric of his prose.⁴⁸ (2007: 7)

Ghosh's real antecedents

In his monograph on Ghosh, Mondal gives some very original insights into Ghosh's intellectual heritage. Most strikingly, he draws attention to the author's real (but often forgotten) Indian antecedents – Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore. He argues that Ghosh's work has an undeniable secular and humanist orientation, and says that though his 'ideological affiliations were moulded by Nehruvian nationalism (and thus indirectly by Tagore), he would gravitate towards the poet rather than the politician in his own critique of the nation-state'⁴⁹ (2007: 35). Tagore's influence on Ghosh can best be understood if we remember Tagore's antipathy towards nationalism. As early as 1917, in the very midst of the anticolonial movement against the British in India, Tagore had declared 'Nationalism is a great menace'⁵⁰ (1917; 2002: 121). The way he saw it, the concept of the 'nation' was built on a premise of 'exclusivity' and narrowness that ultimately detracted from the humanity of man; and it was his contention that the goals of 'humanity' and those of the 'nation' are not the same. In effect, this is what Ghosh says in *The Shadow Lines* – albeit in a more postmodern way.

Ghosh has never quite stopped thinking about the nation. Thus, thirteen years after writing *The Shadow Lines* (within which period India saw many more riots, the most notable being the post-Ayodhya riots of 1993), Ghosh, in an interview with *The Hindu*, had this to say on what he felt about the future of nations:

To date we do not know what is going to take the place of the nation state. Ideally it would be something like the EU; realistically, in most places it's probably going to be more like the fusion that occurred between southern Afghanistan and Pakistan over the last decade – a world of porous borders, warlords and trafficking in everything available. So it seems right now that we are in a moment when the future is still unborn and the past is not quite dead.⁵¹

Ghosh's novel belongs to a mature phase of Indian Writing in English in general and Indian-English fiction in particular. Post-Independence, this body of literature had evolved considerably; post-Rushdie, it flowered and came of age. This is reflected equally in form and content, both of which are strikingly different from all that before. However, the interesting thing to note here is that from the 1980s onwards, there was a preoccupation with the theme of 'Nation' just as in an earlier generation there was a preoccupation with the nationalist struggle and/or the Gandhian movement. As a writer, Ghosh is clearly involved in this process and *The Shadow Lines*, in this sense, is one of the most repre-

sentative works of fiction of its kind. Put simply, it represents a particular phase in the development of Indian Writing in English and voices its chief concerns.⁵² Indeed, as Meenakshi Mukherjee has rightly pointed out,

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), is (...) the one novel written in the 1980s that will survive all the rest that appeared in that boom decade. The novel betrays no anxiety because it attempts to prove nothing and interrogates rather than defines the concept of a totalizing India.⁵³ (2002: 184)

Conclusion

Independent India is now more than sixty years old, and so is the original Partition of the subcontinent into a secular India and an Islamic Pakistan. In the history of Indian Writing in English which is roughly 200 years old¹, this span of time coincides with the rise of the novel form from its being the chosen vehicle of the famous trio of Indian-English fiction – Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan – who started their careers as novelists in the 1930s and 1940s, to its establishment as arguably the most pre-eminent and successful form of creative writing in English on the subcontinent in the 1980s.² Indeed, it may be claimed in all fairness that the most stupendous achievements in Indian Writing in English in the past few decades have undoubtedly been in the genre of the novel.

It is possible to understand today that virtually every decade in India's sixty-year-old history has had its own special concerns in so far as the evolution of the Indian English novel is concerned. Many novels of the 1930s and 1940s, for example, were preoccupied with the nationalist/Gandhian movement; a number of novels of the 1950s and 1960s with the acute sense of the alienation of characters belonging to the privileged sections of Indian society who were caught up in the contrary pulls of tradition and modernity, post-Independence; and several of the novels of the 1980s and 1990s, with the concept of the nation. Yet, remarkably enough, there has been one theme which has remained common to the fiction written over almost all these decades, and this is the theme of the Partition.³ The Partition has proved to be an enduring theme in Indian-English fiction for over six decades, recurring at regular intervals and never failing to produce an impact. Hence, it is important to unearth the reason behind this almost obsessive preoccupation with the Partition on the part of Indian novelists writing in English, and to discern why so many novelists from different generations were concerned with the depiction of the Partition in the first place.

Three factors determining the thrust of the narratives

The Partition, in the words of the historians Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose, has been ‘the central event in modern South Asian history’⁴, a cataclysmic event that impinged upon the lives of millions on the sub-continent, in a way that even the two World Wars had not, in terms of the sheer brutality and damage that it inflicted upon a considerable portion of the population, the mass exile and displacement that it caused and the new schisms that it created among people. This being so, it was therefore perhaps inevitable that the subcontinent’s fiction (both in English and in the vernaculars) would reflect the many problems that the new nations faced, post-Independence, and the many changes that they suffered either as direct consequences or as indirect spin-offs of the Partition of 1947.

In its previous chapters, this book has examined a cross-section of English novels dealing with the Partition written on the subcontinent between the mid-1950s and the late 1980s. But what emerges as most striking is the fact that the treatment of the theme of Partition itself changed significantly over the decades. The novels studied so far have revealed that the most important factors that shaped the contours and determined the thrust of the different Partition narratives were the time in which the novelists were writing (that is, whether close to or distant from the event of the Partition); the value they attached to women as the ‘subjects’ of this traumatic history and the way they perceived the concepts of nation and nationalism.

Concepts of nation and nationhood are crucially linked with the theme of Partition, but there is a marked difference in the way these concepts were perceived by novelists like Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Anita Desai, Bapsi Sidhwa, Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh. The idea of nationalism as a patriotic ideal had much currency during the struggle for independence. This is reflected in the writings of people who grew up at that time. Malgonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges* is a case in point. This novel, along with Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* shows that novels written in the early years of Independence had a tendency to be preoccupied with political events, probably because the authors lived very near to the events they describe.⁵ However, this changed over time. Novelists writing at a later date, especially in the 1980s, whether they be Anita Desai or Bapsi Sidhwa who did not exactly live through the Partition the way Malgonkar and Singh did, or Rushdie or Amitav Ghosh who belong to a more distanced post-Partition generation, clearly have a very different perspective from those writing in the 1950s and the 1960s while dealing professedly with the same theme of Partition.

Set against the early novels of Singh and Malgonkar, Desai's and Sidhwa's novels (*Clear Light of Day* and *Ice-Candy-Man*, respectively) have a more psychological orientation, and they primarily focus on women and their predicament at the time of the Partition, thus highlighting the fact that the Partition not only victimized women but proved to be (in some cases at least) an enabling experience as well. Rushdie and Ghosh, on the other hand, being novelists who are able to write from a certain vantage point in history, not only study the impact of the Partition on the lives of the principal characters (in *Midnight's Children* and *The Shadow Lines*, respectively) but also scrutinize the long-term changes wrought by it in the national life. Moreover, the concept of nations as 'imagined communities' informs their vision and underpins the very fabric of their texts. They are, in fact, concerned not so much with representing the cataclysmic event of the Partition as in exploring (in different ways) the idea of a nation.

Thus, as one journeys from the mid-1950s to the late 1980s, one may discern in a number of the Partition novels of this period a palpable shift from something akin to direct reportage to a more distinct theoretical accent; a shift also from the representation of the immediate practical consequences of the Partition to the depiction of the more subtle nuances of its impact on public and private life. To put it simply, the Partition novels of the 1950s and the 1960s register the shock and awe of the Partition, while those of the 1980s theorize about it. However, it would be obviously wrong to make this an absolute statement, as there are notable exceptions. As this book shows, there are at least two novels of the 1980s that do not share the predominant concerns of the majority of the Partition novels written in that decade. Thus, *Clear Light of Day* is different from every other novel in this category in its subtle evocation of the personal ramifications of the Partition in its uncanny ability to alter and transform intimate spaces,⁶ and *Ice-Candy-Man*, though it was published last of all among the novels discussed in this book, seems to have more in common with the novels of the 1950s and 1960s discussed here, in its detailed description of the events that led to the Partition in the Punjab (Lahore to be more precise) than with Rushdie's or Ghosh's novels. But here again, *Ice-Candy-Man* admits of another qualification. For, unlike Singh's or Malgonkar's Partition novels, Sidhwa's fiction is a feminine perspectivization of the Partition, and we are given here a glimpse into the roles and lives of women as both victims and agents, as sufferers and arbiters of fate. Certainly, the violation of women on an unprecedented scale was one of the defining features of the Partition, for much Partition violence was synonymous with rape, loot and arson. Sidhwa's novel faithfully represents this aspect of the Partition, while at the same time not forgetting to show the

ironically enabling role that the Partition played in the lives of many of the subcontinent's women.⁷

The six novels in this book thus represent three major ways of looking at the Partition. In as many as three of them, there is a preoccupation with the Partition, these novels being *Train to Pakistan*, *A Bend in the Ganges* and *Ice-Candy-Man*. But while *Train to Pakistan* records events that happen on a border village (on the western frontier) at the time of the Partition, in both *A Bend in the Ganges* and *Ice-Candy-Man*, the events depicted lead up to the Partition, Partition figuring as a kind of climax in the narrative. But here again, there are important differences. *Ice-Candy-Man* focuses primarily on the city of Lahore and records its transformation from the end of the Second World War (when the Parsees celebrate the Allied victory) to the Partition of the subcontinent in August 1947 (when the Boundary Commission declares the city to be a part of the newly created state of Pakistan). *A Bend in the Ganges*, on the other hand, is much more panoramic in scope. It has a much wider canvas, both in terms of time and space, for its narrative time frame covers the entire period of the nationalist struggle from the early 1920s to 1947, and its locales are spread over far-flung parts of the subcontinent and also include the various theatres of war in South-East Asia.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is unique in that it is the only Partition novel where we are shown the events leading up to the Partition as well as those that followed in its aftermath. It is the only novel to deal with the two Partitions of the subcontinent, in 1947 and 1971; and again, it is the only novel to be set in all three partitioned states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The characters in this novel inhabit all these places, and through their experiences we are privileged to see the very different trajectories of democracy in these nascent states. We are also shown what it was like to live in newly independent India and Pakistan and (more importantly) the differences between these life experiences. Thus, Saleem, we are told, at the inception of his adolescence, leaves the 'highly-spiced non-conformity of Bombay' (Rushdie 1981: 308) for Karachi in Pakistan, where 'truth is what it is instructed to be' (Rushdie 1981: 326).⁸ In a more concrete way, *Midnight's Children* charts the disintegration and the peculiar predicament of the Muslim community on the subcontinent for whom neither Independence nor the Partition managed to deliver the promised goals, because between the largely hypocritical secularism of independent India and the stifling of all civic freedoms in Islamic Pakistan, they had very little to choose from.

Yet, if *Midnight's Children's* uniqueness in its depiction of the Partition lies (among other things) in the fact that it takes within its ambit both the prelude to and the aftermath of this cataclysmic event, then Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*: stands out among the novels dis-

cussed in this study in its exclusive focus on the aftermath of the Partition. It explores the far-reaching consequences of the Partition of the subcontinent in terms of communal violence in a way no other novel does. In fact, it is not so much about the Partition as a deep introspection on what constitutes 'freedom' and an equally incisive interrogation of the very concept of a 'nation'. It shares with *Midnight's Children* this emphasis on the theorization of the Partition, and in a way continues what was already begun by Rushdie, i.e. an engagement with the implications of dividing a country on the basis of religion.

Interflows of images/motifs

Finally, it is also important to note that while there are admittedly all these different ways in which the Partition has been perspectivized in fiction, it is true that cutting across these divisions there are also intriguing interflows of images, themes, and motifs. The first of these is the image of the trainload of corpses, which is one of the most common themes in Partition literature, immortalized in many books and films.⁹ It is good to remember here the symbolic significance of trains at the time of the Partition, for the reality of the newly created lines were actually being concretized by trains, which carried millions of hapless refugees across the new borders. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that the drama of the exchange of populations was being played out on the railway tracks of the two nations. And frequently, these trainloads of refugees turned into trainloads of corpses.

An interesting history of this trope can be further traced from within the novels discussed in this book itself. From the main plot itself revolving around a trainload of corpses in *Train to Pakistan* (where the whole story is about how another such instance is prevented from happening), this image is reduced to being an element at a crucial moment in the narrative in *Ice-Candy-Man* (as the Gurdaspur train incident transforms the happy-go-lucky popsicle man into an avowed communalist pledged to revenge and violence), before being further reduced to just a rumour in *The Shadow Lines*: (a rumour which still has the potential to act powerfully on the minds of the masses, as the Tala drinking water Tank in Calcutta is supposedly poisoned on the basis of this).

It is then the concept of the line that divides nations that generates the greatest degree of cogitation in most Partition novels. The border symbolizes, stands for or means different things to different novelists. The most common opinion expressed in the early Partition novels is that arbitrarily drawn border lines sundered the Indian subcontinent into two bits of unequal land, and most of these fictions regret this fact as something that was imposed and should not have happened. A great

deal is said in these texts about what happened on the borders of the two newly created nations; but there is no questioning of the *concept* of the border as such, at least in the first few novels. *Train to Pakistan* for instance is totally preoccupied with how to get a train across the border. The second part of *Ice-Candy-Man* is also taken up with all the efforts that were being made by Ayah's wellwishers to send her across the border to her family in Amritsar. Like Khushwant Singh's novel, a train-load of dead crossing a border does play its part here too (though in a very different way, as has already been discussed above). It needs to be added here, however, that there is much reflection on the arbitrariness of the Radcliffe line in Sidhwa's novel, underlining the unfairness and injustice of the all too hasty work of the Boundary Commission.

Yet, it is only when we come to *Midnight's Children* that we get a radically different stance on the issue of borders. In effect, what Rushdie says here in Book I, Chapter 9 ('Tick, Tock'), is that it is the line that divided the subcontinent in 1947 that gave Indians (and the Pakistanis) their true identity. However, *The Shadow Lines*: is the only Partition novel examined in this book that really questions the concept of the border, questions very seriously whether the shadow line that we inscribe to separate people into different nations has any validity, or whether it is an absurd illusion. It is Ghosh's contention in this novel that borders themselves are fictive and illusive, that they defeat and negate the very reason behind their ostensible existence. What Tridib's atlas demonstrates to the narrator, the lesson he learns after a harrowing seventeen-year-long search for the truth of Tridib's death, is that in the ultimate analysis, borderlines do not mean anything at all. But beyond this, yet another interesting aspect of the *The Shadow Lines*: is that it gives us a representation of the nation in both colonial and post-colonial times through characters who belong to three contiguous generations (Jethamoshai, Thamma and Robi); and it shows how the narrator, with the gift of vision bequeathed by Tridib, not only uncovers but also bridges all the earlier perspectives towards nationhood.

The loss of a dear one because of communal violence is another trope that recurs in the Partition novels studied here. It is interesting to note that the plots of both *Ice-Candy-Man* and *The Shadow Lines*: centre around an irrevocable loss, that of a parent figure or loved one, by a child. Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* is to the nameless protagonist of Ghosh's novel¹⁰ what Ayah is to Lenny in *Ice-Candy-Man*. The loss, in both cases, changes the protagonists' lives forever, and it is while coping with this loss that they both learn to come to terms with themselves and the larger sociopolitical realities that affect their lives. Both actually grow up in the shadow of loss. To this extent, the two novels share a common strand. But whereas in Ghosh's novel Tridib's loss leads the protagonist to explore questions about national identity and nationhood,

to learn the 'meaning of distance', Ayah's loss in *Ice-Candy-Man* gives Lenny insights into the vulnerability and predicament of being a woman. In other words, if Ghosh leads the narrator to ruminate on the world outside, Sidhwa shows Lenny's awakening to the complexities of the mind within, and so to an understanding of the immense distance that lies between the public sphere and private self.

Each of the Partition-centered works of fiction examined here is an act of remembrance and the product of a quest to understand why a political event caused so much hostility, internecine violence and bloodshed among communities that had peacefully coexisted for almost half a millennium on a common landmass. Understandably, each novelist has his or her own perspective and unique way of depicting the theme of Partition. But, ultimately, each attempt, each narration, and each novel tells us a great deal about how the telling and the tale are intertwined. For Partition novels stridently contradict Aristotle's dictum that 'the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen'¹¹, even as they appear to valorize George Lukac's point that novelists thematizing historical issues 'should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act as they did in historical reality'.¹²

Glossary

Dacoit means “bandit”. It is the anglicized version of the word ‘daku’ (in Hindi) and ‘dakat’ (in Bangla). The word came into English usage during the British colonial period in India. Originally, dacoits were a class of robbers active in India and Burma, who plundered in armed bands.

Jashan means “celebration”. It is an Urdu word used widely by people of many communities in the subcontinent. For the Parsees, it has a religious connotation as well. For them, ‘Jashan’ is a religious service held in honour of the eleven divinities of the Zoroastrian pantheon. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, the Parsees of British India organized several [public] jashans in honour of British war victories. [See note 32 of CH II, on page 206].

The protagonist of Bapsi Sidhwa’s novel *Ice-Candy-Man*, the eight-year-old Lenny, celebrates one such victory, the Allied victory of 1945, in a ‘Jashan’ in Lahore, along with her Parsee parents, relatives and friends.

Junglewallah is a Parsee last name. A common trait of a lot of Parsee last names is that they have a ‘wallah’ or ‘wala’ at the end. Usually, it is an occupation indicator (‘Daruwala’ is a wine merchant, ‘Aloowala’, a potato merchant).

The protagonist of Bapsi Sidhwa’s first novel, *The Crow-Eaters*, is a humorous character named Faredoon Junglewallah.

Lambardar Under British rule, a ‘lambardar’ was the tax-collector and the headman of a village, in the province of Punjab. The name literally means “person holding a number” (‘Lambar’ is the English ‘number’, and ‘dar’ is Persian for ‘holder’). It arose from the fact that, in the system of British tax collection, each village headman was assigned a number in the government registers,

Maulvi is an honorific title for an Islamic religious scholar. It is derived from the Arabic word “Mawla”, which means “master” or “lord”.

In Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's mother's family, on the insistence of his grandmother, receives religious instruction from a maulvi in their home.

Pathan refers to an ethnic, Pushtu-speaking Afghan. Primarily a martial race, the Pathan population predominates in Afghanistan, the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan province of Pakistan.

Sepoy An Indian soldier serving in the British Indian army was called a 'sepoy'.

The word has been immortalized in history with the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 (also called the Great Revolt or the First War of Indian Independence) – when Indian sepoys spearheaded a revolt against the British Empire.

Sethis is a surname common to Hindus, Muslims and Parsees of the subcontinent.

It is derived from the Sanskrit word "sresthi" or "shresth", which means "the best among all". Sethis have for centuries distinguished themselves in the civil, administrative and military services, as well as business, in the subcontinent.

Lenny, the protagonist of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-Candy-Man*, belongs to a 'Sethi' Parsee household.

Zenana is Urdu for "women's quarters" in Muslim houses of the subcontinent.

It encapsulates the private, sequestered nature of women's existence in orthodox Muslim families.

Notes

Introduction

- 1 Ahsan, Aitzaz (1996), *The Indus Saga and the Making of Partition*. Karachi: Oxford University Press. On the myth of a unified, primordial Muslim nation, see Mushirul Hasan (2001), 'The Myth of Muslim Unity: Colonial and Nationalist Narratives,' in *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 2 Banerjee, Anil Kumar (1985), *History of Modern India*. Calcutta: A. Mukherjee & Co. Pvt. Ltd.
- 3 Sarkar, Sumit (1983), *Modern India*. New Delhi: Macmillan.
- 4 Chandra, Bipan (1999), *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947*, New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- 5 Nehru once described Jinnah as 'one of the most extraordinary men in history' whose 'success in life arose from never agreeing to anything'. Cited in 'Partition in Retrospect' (1999), in Diana Mansergh (ed.), *Independence Years: The Selected Indian and Commonwealth Papers of Nicholas Mansergh*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. After giving this quote, the author adds:

Indeed, nobody could deny the supreme skill of Jinnah as a negotiator. However frustrating and difficult others found him, he never made a concession which compromised his main goal. (p. 235)
- 6 Jalal, Ayesha (1985), *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 7 An excellent analysis of Jalal's thesis may be found in Prof. Rajat Kanta Ray's article 'League, Congressmen and the British: The Pakistan Movement of 1940-47', published in *The Indian Historical Review* (1995, pp. 127-46).
- 8 In 2009, almost a quarter of a century after Jalal's study, the renowned Indian politician and diplomat, Jaswant Singh, created a furore in India with his book, *Jinnah: India, Partition, Independence* (New Delhi: Rupa & Company). His sympathetic portrayal of Jinnah and his critique of the Congress leadership and its role in the Partition of India cost him his membership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a shocking event that initiated a whole new debate on 'freedom of expression' in India.
- 9 Campbell-Johnson, Alan (1952), *Mission with Mountbatten*. London: Robert Hale.
- 10 Ziegler, Philip (1985), *Mountbatten*. London: Collins.
- 11 Wolpert, Stanley (2006), *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 12 Roberts, Andrew (1994), 'Lord Mountbatten and the Perils of Adrenalin,' in *Eminent Churchillians*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- 13 Wolpert, Stanley (2006), *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India*, op. cit. p. 2.
- 14 Sarila, Narendra Singh (2005), *The Shadow of the Great Game: The Untold Story of India's Partition*. New Delhi: Harper Collins.

- 15 Mansergh, Diana (ed.) (1999), *Independence Years: The Selected Indian and Commonwealth Papers of Nicholas Mansergh*, 220. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 16 Page, David (1999), *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920-1932*. New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks.
- 17 Singh, Anita Inder (1987), 'Preface', *The Origins of the Partition of India 1936-1947*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. v.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. vii.
- 20 Chatterjee, Joya (1994), *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932-1947*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 227.
- 22 Two seminal works on the Partition published in the 1980s that had a regional focus (Punjab/North-West/North-East India) were – Talbot, Ian (1988), *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement: The Growth of the Muslim League in North-West and North-East India 1937-1947*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, and; Gilmartin, David (1988), *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 23 See Kudaisya, Gyanesh & Tai Yong Tan (2000), *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia), 14. London: Routledge.
- 24 Chatterjee, Joya (1994), *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932-1947*, op. cit. p. 17.
- 25 Bose, Sugata & Ayesha Jalal (2004), *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, 160. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- 27 See Chapter 9 of Lappierre, Dominique & Larry Collins (1976), *Freedom at Midnight*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.
- 28 See Chapter 3 of Mansergh, Diana (ed.) (1999), *Independence Years: The Selected Indian and Commonwealth Papers of Nicholas Mansergh*.
- 29 Hamid, Shahid (1986), *Disastrous Twilight*. London: Leo Cooper. Cited by Arjun Mahhey (2001) in his essay 'Partition Narratives: Some Observations', in Ravikant & Tarun K. Saint (eds.), *Translating Partition*. New Delhi: Katha.
- 30 Bhalla, Alok (ed.) (1994), 'Introduction', *Stories about the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Harper Collins India.
- 31 Nehru, Jawaharlal (1936; 1988), *An Autobiography*. New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Fund.
- 32 Nehru, Jawaharlal (1945; 1988), *The Discovery of India*. New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Fund.
- 33 Page, David (1999), *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920-1932*, op.cit. p. xxxvii.
- 34 *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 April 1993. The two articles were – Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin's *Recovery, Rupture and Resistance: the Indian State and the Abduction of Women during Partition*; and Urvashi Butalia's *Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency during Partition*. Cited in David Page, 'Introduction to the Paperback Edition', Note no. 62, p. li.
- 35 These authors later published full-length books elaborating on these themes. They were: Menon, Ritu & Kamla Bhasin (1998), *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. New Delhi: Kali for Women. Butalia, Urvashi (1998), *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from India's Partition*. New Delhi: Viking.
- 36 Bose, Sugata & Ayesha Jalal (2004), *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, op.cit. p. 164 A representative selection of Saadat Hasan Manto's Partition writings can be found in *Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition*, translated from the Urdu by Khalid Hasan. This is a commemorative volume that was

brought out by Penguin India on the Golden Jubilee of India's Independence in 1997. While talking of Ritwik Ghatak's films centering round Partition, special mention should be made of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud-capped Star), 1960; *Komal Gandhar* (E Flat), 1961; and *Subarnarekha* (The Golden Thread), 1962. In this context, it may be pertinent to quote Nitish Sen Gupta's comment on Ghatak's films in his book *Bengal Divided: The Unmaking of a Nation* (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2007). Sen Gupta says:

For Ritwik Ghatak, the film-maker, the indivisible Bengal was an article of faith and the cruelty of dividing this unity was shown in his series of memorable films. (p. 167)

- 37 Representative examples of this kind would be Azeez Ahmad's *Kaali Raat* (Dark Nights), Hayat Ullah Ansari's *Shukar Guzar Ankhien* (Grateful Eyes) and Premnath Dar's *Akh Thu* (I Spit On It All). All these stories may be found in the book edited by Alok Bhalla.
- 38 Manto, Saadat Hasan (2003), *Siyah Hashye*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co.
- 39 Manto, Saadat Hasan (1997), 'Introduction', *Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition*, translated from the Urdu by Khalid Hasan, New Delhi: Penguin, pp. xx-xxi.
- 40 Bhalla, Alok (ed.) (1994), 'Introduction', *Stories about the Partition of India*, op.cit. p. xvii.
- 41 Mukherjee, Meenakshi (2002), *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*, 180. New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks.
- 42 Rushdie, among others, has dismissed *Rajmohan's Wife* as a 'dud' (in the 'Introduction' to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing in English*). On the whole, it is remembered mostly as a 'false start' in English by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, who (like Michael Madhusudan Dutt), after trying his hand at English poetry, reverted to writing in Bengali, and soon earned eminence in it. A very interesting narrative of the history of its publication can be found in the 2005 Rupa Edition of the text of *Rajmohan's Wife*, annotated by the eminent critic and scholar, Meenakshi Mukherjee.
- 43 Mukherjee, Meenakshi (2002), *The Twice-born Fiction: A Study of the Themes and Techniques of Indian Novels in English 1930-1964*, 19. New Delhi: Pencraft International.
- 44 Bhattacharya, Shankar (1994), *Manohar Malgonkar: A Study of His Mind & Art*, 2. New Delhi: Creative Books.
- 45 Mukherjee, Meenakshi (2002), *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*, op.cit. p. 173.
- 46 See Naik, M.K. (2004), *A History of Indian English Literature*, 114-186. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy.
- 47 One of the most interesting novels to be written on the subject after Independence is R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1956) – which, unlike most fiction dealing with the Mahatma, is a humorous take on the Gandhian movement.
- 48 The two most interesting aspects of Baldwin's novel are that it tells the Partition story from a purely Sikh perspective and has a stridently feminist stance in its depiction of the central character of Satya. It won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for 2001.
- 49 For a detailed discussion of this much-neglected aspect of the administrative consequences of the Partition of 1947, see Chatterjee, Joya (2001), 'Right or Charity? The Debate over Relief and Rehabilitation in West Bengal, 1947-50', in Suvir Kaul (ed.), *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*. New Delhi: Permanent Black. Also see the 'Introduction' to Jasodhara Bagchi & Subhoranjan Dasgupta (eds.) (2003), *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*. Calcutta: Stree.

- 50 Chatterjee (2007) explores this theme in great detail in her next book, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 51 Of late, this trend has changed a bit. See Fraser, Bashabi (2006), *Bengal Partition Stories: An Unclosed Chapter*. London: Anthem Press.
- 52 Actually, it was the third Partition of Bengal – after 1905 (which was later annulled in 1911) and 1947. For a history of the 1905 Partition of Bengal and a detailed study of the famous nationalist movement (*Swadeshi*) that it engendered, see Sarkar, Sumit (1973), *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*. New Delhi: People's Publishing House.
- 53 *Train to Pakistan* (published in the United States under the title *Mano Majra*) was popular from the time of its very first publication in 1956, and in fact won the 'Grove India Fiction prize' the same year.
- 54 Other well-known Partition novels penned by Pakistani authors are – Mumtaz Shah Nawaz's *The Heart Divided* (1957; Lahore: ASR Publications, 1990); Zulfikar Ghose's *The Murder of Azim Khan* (London: Macmillan, 1967); Nasir Ahmed Farooki's *Faces of Love and Death* (Lahore: Watan Publications, 1961) and *Snakes and Ladders* (Lahore: Watan Publications, 1969); and Mahmud Sipra's *Pawn to King Three* (London: Michael Joseph, 1985). To learn more about these authors and understand their works (especially that of Ghose and Sidhwa) in the larger tradition of Pakistani writing in English, see Rahman, Tariq (1991), *A History of Pakistani Literature in English*. Lahore: Vanguard.
- 55 1947: *Earth* was the second in a series of films directed by Mehta named after the elements. The first in the series was *Fire*; and the third, the Oscar-nominated *Water*.
- 56 Please refer back to note 18.
- 57 See Bodh Prakash's essay (2001), 'The Woman Protagonist in Partition Literature', in Ravikant & Tarun K. Saint (eds.), *Translating Partition, 194-209*. New Delhi: Katha.
- 58 Financed by Booker McConnell, a multinational conglomerate company, the Booker is awarded annually for the best full-length novel in the British Commonwealth of Nations. In 2002, the Man Group became sponsor of the Booker Prize Foundation, and the prize is currently named the 'Man Booker Prize for Fiction'. It may be noted here that three other Indians won the Booker after Rushdie – Arundhati Roy for *The God of Small Things* in 1997; Kiran Desai for *The Inheritance of Loss* in 2006; and most recently, Aravind Adiga for *The White Tiger* in 2008. For an interesting history of the Booker Prize and the way it has shaped contemporary British fiction, see Todd, R.K. (1996), *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*. London: Bloomsbury.
- 59 For a discussion of this aspect of the novel, see Dhar, Subir (2004), 'Postmodernism and *Midnight's Children*' in Tapan K. Ghosh (ed.), *Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children: A Reader's Companion*, 268-279. New Delhi: asia book club.
- 60 It may be helpful to refer to Priyamvada Gopal's insightful comment about the special quality of Ghosh's writing in this context – the one that endears him to both the general reader as well as scholars and critics:
- Although [his novels] vary substantially in subject matter and quality, they are all marked by a remarkable synthesis of creative energy and intellectual acuity. A similar combination of literary flair and sober analysis distinguishes Ghosh's essays and travelogues; they are generally incisive and always highly readable.
- Among the many luminaries who dot the landscape of Indian Writing in English today, Ghosh stands out both for the clarity of his prose and his sharp yet always humane insights. 'Amitav Ghosh' (2004), in Jay Parini (ed.), *World Writers Series*, pg.no. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, Thomson Gale.
- 61 Kundera, Milan (1978; 1996), *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. London: Faber & Faber.

- 62 Rao, Raja (1938), *Kanthapura*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- 63 Narayan, R.K. (1955; 1997), *Waiting for the Mahatma*. Mysore: Indian Thought Publications.
- 64 Hossain, Attia (1961; 1992), *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- 65 Abbas, Khwaja Ahmed (1958), *Inquilab*. New Delhi: Jaico Publishing House.
- 66 Markandaya, Kamala (1955), *Some Inner Fury*. London: Putnam.
- 67 Sahgal, Nayantara (1958), *A Time to be Happy*. New York: Knopf.
- 68 Nahal, Chaman (1975; 2001), *Azadi*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- 69 Kesavan, Mukul (1995), *Looking Through Glass*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.
- 70 Dhawan, R.K. (ed.) (1982), *Explorations in Modern Indo-English Fiction*. New Delhi: Bahri Publications Private Limited.
- 71 Pathak, R.S. (ed.) (1994), *Recent Indian Fiction*. New Delhi: Prestige.
- 72 Ravi, P.S. (2003), *Modern Indian Fiction: History, Politics and the Individual in the Novels of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee*. New Delhi: Prestige.
- 73 Bhatnagar, M.K. (2003), *Modern Indian English Novel: A Critical Study of the Political Motif*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors.
- 74 Paranjape, Makarand (2000), *Towards a Poetics of the Indian English Novel*, 122. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 Mukherjee, Meenakshi (2005), *The Twice-born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of Indian Novels in English*. New Delhi: Pencraft International.
- 77 Riemenschneider, Dieter (2005), *The Indian Novel in English: Its Critical Discourse 1934-2004*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
- 78 Singh, P.K. (2005), *The Novels of Khushwant Singh: A Critical Evaluation*. New Delhi: Book Enclave.
- 79 Mondal, Anshuman (2007), *Amitav Ghosh* (Contemporary World Writers Series). Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press.
- 80 Neb, Narinder & Tejinder Kaur (eds.) (2006), *Perspectives on the Partition Fiction of the Indian Sub-continent, 147-158*. Jalandhar: Nirman Publications.
- 81 Dhawan, R.K. & Neena Arora (eds.) (2010), *Partition and Indian Literature*, Vol. 2, 24-38. New Delhi: Prestige.
- 82 Gundur, N.S. (2008), *Partition and Indian English Fiction*. New Delhi: Adhyayan Publishers & Distributors.
- 83 More, D.R. (2008), *The Novels on the Indian Partition*. Jaipur: Shruti Publications.
- 84 Mukherjee, Meenakshi (ed.) (1999), *Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children': A Book of Readings*. New Delhi: Pencraft International.
- 85 (2002), *The Shadow Lines: Educational Edition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 86 Gaur, Rashmi (ed.) (2004), *Bapsi Sidhwa's 'Ice-Candy-Man': A Reader's Companion*. New Delhi: asia book club.

Chapter 1

- 1 Wolpert, Stanley (2006). *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2 Singh, Khushwant (1956; 1988), *Train to Pakistan*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.
- 3 The high point of Khushwant Singh's journalistic career was his editorship of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, which became India's pre-eminent newsweekly during his tenure in the 1970s.
- 4 Khushwant Singh started writing history long before he attempted fiction; and at regular intervals over five decades, has written on various facets of the history of the

- Punjab, and especially, that of his own community, the Sikhs. His most notable works as a historian include – *A History of the Sikhs 1469-1964*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963; *Ranjit Singh: Maharajah of the Punjab 1780-1839*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1963; *Tragedy of the Punjab: Operation Bluestar and After*, with Kuldip Nayar, New Delhi: Vision, 1984; *A History of the Sikhs: 1469-1838*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; *A History of the Sikhs: 1839-2004*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- 5 As Editor-in-chief of *Penguin India*, Khushwant Singh actively encouraged and promoted fresh talent in Indian-English writing; and over the last few decades, Indian-English fiction has become one of the hallmarks of Penguin publishing in India.
 - 6 Singh, Khushwant (1959; 1997), *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.
 - 7 Singh, Khushwant (1990), *Delhi: A Novel*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India.
 - 8 Singh, Khushwant (1999), *The Company of Women*. New Delhi: Viking Press.
 - 9 Singh, Khushwant (2004), *Burial at Sea*. New Delhi: Penguin Viking.
 - 10 Rushdie said this in an interview with Salil Tripathi for *Celebrity* (May 1983). This interview has been anthologized in Reder, Michael R. (ed.) (2000), *Conversations with Salman Rushdie* (Literary Conversations Series), 25. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
 - 11 Ghosh paid this tribute to Khushwant Singh when the latter launched his novel, *The Hungry Tide*, in New Delhi in July 2004. Source: <http://kitabkhana.blogspot.com/2004/08/amitav-in-dilli.html>
 - 12 Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa (1962; 1996), *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling.
 - 13 Mukherjee, Meenakshi (2005), *The Twice-born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of Indian Novels in English*. New Delhi: Pencraft International.
 - 14 Walsh, William (1990), *Indian Writing in English*. London & New York: Longman.
 - 15 Brians, Paul (2003), *Modern South Asian Literature in English* ('Literature as Windows to World Cultures' Series). London & Westport: Greenwood Press.
 - 16 Singh, Khushwant (2002), *Truth, Love & a Little Malice: An Autobiography*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher & Penguin Books India.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, p. 108.
 - 19 Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa (1962; 1996), *Indian Writing in English*, op.cit. 502.
 - 20 Two of these three books are collections of Urdu and Hindi short stories of the Partition in English translation – Bhalla, Alok (ed.) (1994), *Stories about the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Harper Collins India; and Memon, M.U. (ed. & tr.) (1998), *An Epic Unwritten*. New Delhi: Penguin India. The third – Ravikant & Tarun K. Saint (eds.) (2005), *Translating Partition*. New Delhi: Katha – is another such selection with critical commentary on the included stories and a few relevant essays/articles as an additional feature.
 - 21 All three stories can be found in Alok Bhalla's book mentioned above.
 - 22 Singh, Khushwant (1956; 1988), *Train to Pakistan*, 91-92. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal. All page references to the text are from this edition, and will subsequently be marked in parentheses.
 - 23 The confusion in the village is caused by the anomaly of the name 'Iqbal', which could easily be either Muslim or Sikh or Hindu (Iqbal Khan or Iqbal Singh or Iqbal Chand). One is reminded here of Raja Choudhury in Aparna Sen's film *Mr & Mrs Iyer* (2004), who is first mistaken as Hindu by his co-traveller, Mrs Iyer, because of his name and then forced to become Mr Iyer when a bunch of Hindu fanatics attack their bus. He muses on the irony of religious identity in India towards the end of the film, recalling, that way back in 1984 in Calcutta, he had felt grateful for being a

- Muslim when, in front of his own eyes, he had seen a Sikh shopkeeper being murdered.
- 24 Gandhi seems to have believed in the same logic. In chapter XVIII of *Hind Swaraj* (1907; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) entitled 'Education', the editor asks his reader, 'What do you propose to do by giving him [the Indian peasant] a knowledge of letters? Will you add [by that means] an inch to his happiness?' (p. 101).
 - 25 Iyengar, K.R. Srinivasa (1962; 1996), *Indian Writing in English*, op. cit. 501.
 - 26 Rushdie, Salman & Elizabeth West (eds.) (1997), *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing in English*, 237-49. London: Vintage.
 - 27 Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam (1958; 1988), *India Wins Freedom*, p. 208. New Delhi: Orient Longman.
 - 28 Modern social historians have indicated as much. See, for instance, Gyanendra Pandey's examination of the very crucial role played by rumours during the Partition riots of 1947 in the Punjab in *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism & History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
 - 29 Kaul, Suvir (ed.) (2001), *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, 18. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
 - 30 Naik, M.K. (2004), *A History of Indian English Literature*, 220. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy.
 - 31 Kaul, Suvir (ed.) (2001), *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, op.cit. p. 15.
 - 32 Malgonkar, Manohar (1964), *A Bend in the Ganges*. London: Pan Books Ltd.
 - 33 Padmanabhan, A. (2002), *The Fictional World of Manohar Malgonkar*, 2. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.
 - 34 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
 - 35 It is a rather dismissive statement in an otherwise perceptive chapter, entitled 'The Making of a Nation' (2005), in *The Twice-born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English*, 65. New Delhi: Pencraft International.
 - 36 Dayananda, James Y. (1974), *Manohar Malgonkar*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.
 - 37 Padmanabhan, A. *The Fictional World of Manohar Malgonkar*, op.cit. p. 38.
 - 38 Bhattacharya, Shankar (1994), *Manohar Malgonkar: A Study of His Mind & Art*. New Delhi: Creative Books.
 - 39 Two other common assumptions in post-colonial theory is that post-colonial literatures (invariably) attempt to subvert the colonizer's language and utilize native narrative techniques. See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin (eds.) (1989), *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. New York: Routledge. None of the above is, however, applicable to *A Bend in the Ganges*.
 - 40 Bose, Sugata & Ayesha Jalal (2004), *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, 135. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
 - 41 Malgonkar, Manohar (1964), *A Bend in the Ganges*. London: Pan Books Ltd. All page references to the text are from this edition, and will subsequently be marked in parentheses.
 - 42 According to Muhirul Hasan, a splendid opportunity for building a united India was lost in 1927-1928. He analyzes this at length in *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India 1916-1928*. (New Delhi, 1979). A detailed discussion of the reasons behind the failure of this particular initiative can also be found in Prof. Rajat Kanta Ray's article 'League, Congressmen and the British: The Pakistan Movement of 1940-47', published in *The Indian Historical Review* (1995, 127-146).
 - 43 Malgonkar traces the history of communalism in India (in the final decades of the British rule) in just the way that the historian Bipan Chandra has analyzed this phenomenon in three successive chapters in his book *India's Struggle for Independence*:

- 1857-1947 (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999). The respective chapters of the book are: 'The Rise and Growth of Communalism' (398-413), 'Communalism - The Liberal Phase' (414-427), and 'Jinnah, Golwalkar and Extreme Communalism' (428-442).
- 44 Malgonkar himself gives a very different picture of the communal mentality of those in the armed forces in 1947 (and immediately thereafter) in *Distant Drum* (1960). In this novel, he shows how the soldiers of the Indian army were the only ones who stayed above sectarian prejudices/bias during the 1947 holocaust, and it was largely because of this component in the defence forces that the unprecedented riots of 1947 could be tackled to some degree. While Malgonkar focuses on the city of Delhi in *Distant Drum*, Chaman Nahal shows a similar thing happening in the town of Sialkot in his novel *Azadi* (1975; New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001).
- 45 See Chapter 15 of Bipan Chandra's *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947*.
- 46 Andamans/Rangoon/Burma – *A Bend in the Ganges* is the only Indian-English novel to deal with these other theatres of the Second World War in Asia. In most works of fiction, it is usually only kept in the background and never allowed to come alive (as it were).
- 47 The Bombay dock explosion, too, is another event of the 1940s that does not find a place in any other novel dealing with this period.
- 48 It is important to note that the Second World War and its effects on the lives of Indians are referred to in all of Malgonkar's novels. Most of the battles in his fictional world are, in fact, fought at this time. In *Princes* (London: Viking Press, 1963), Abhayraj's well-ordered life turns topsy-turvy during the War; in *Combat of Shadows* (1962), Henry Winton's relationship with Sir Jeffrey Dart is broken as the latter withholds the former's application for Commission; while it is as a result of the Japanese attack on the Andamans that Gian Talwar and Debi Dayal are able to come out of their imprisonment in *A Bend in the Ganges*.
- 49 Kakkar, Sudhir (2004), *Mira & the Mahatma*. New Delhi: Penguin/Viking. In this context, one may also cite R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955; Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1997) which is a humorous take on the Gandhian movement. It is Narayan's contention here that not everyone who joined the movement was high on ideology or avowed patriots. His protagonist, Sriram, for example, is a good-for-nothing twenty-year old who joins the Satyagraha movement not out of political idealism but only for the love of a girl, Bharati (a committed Gandhian), who had come to Malgudi as part of the Mahatma's entourage. She initiates Sriram into the movement with great zeal but what she does not understand is that, for him, joining the Mahatma's mission is simply the surest means to his beloved's heart, the only way to gain her esteem and approval; her acceptance. In fact, till the very end, Bharati remains the goal towards which his life moves. In this novel, Narayan thus fundamentally questions the supposedly pervasive and compelling magnetism of the Mahatma, his hold on the masses. And this is exactly what is so unusual and unique about the work. Contrary to popular opinion, we are given the impression that Gandhi's tenets perhaps seldom percolated down to the grassroots level. (There are ample examples in the novel to support this thesis.)
- 50 There is an almost identical passage in Amitav Ghosh's cyber correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty centering round the latter's book *Provincializing Europe: Historical Thought and Postcolonial Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), from December 14-23, 2000, that was posted on Ghosh's official website, www.amitavghosh.com. Speaking about the racial attitude of the British in the conduct of its colonies, Ghosh says:
- Race (...) was the foundational social fact of the post-1857 Empire – an idea embedded more in practice than in discourse – and it grew ever stronger from the mid-19th century onward. I was struck by this when I was researching the British

response to the Japanese invasion of Malaya and Burma. In Malaya, while evacuating their government from the north, they stuck absolutely resolutely to the principles of race: trains were forbidden to transport 'non-Europeans' (...) Similarly, in Northern Burma in 1942, in a moment of total crisis with hundreds of thousands of civilians heading for the mountains, the British still found time to set up 'white' and 'black' evacuation routes.

After giving these Second World War examples, Ghosh concludes:

'Race was much more than just a tool of Empire: it was (in the Kantian sense) one of the foundational categories of thought that made other perceptions possible.'

- 51 Source: <http://audiopoetry.wordpress.com/category/poet/bismil-azimabadi/>
For the English translation, I would like to thank my friend Sangita Parikh. This poem has been used to marvellous effect by the Indian director Rakesh Omprakash Mehra in his Hindi film *Rang de Basanti* (2006) with the Indian superstar Aamir Khan in a leading role. The film is a modern take on the story of the Punjabi revolutionary terrorists of the early 1930s led by the legendary Bhagat Singh. Mehra's work was one of the best among a spate of Hindi films (all released within a year) on the charismatic young revolutionary who died a martyr to his cause.
- 52 Nicholas Mansergh, during his visit to India at that time, noted that:
By not a few wealthy Hindus it was felt that Gandhi's doctrine had served its day. Warm though the tribute be to the unique contribution which Gandhi had made to the Indian national movement, it was felt the time had now come when he should stand aside. There was no longer, so it was argued, any alternative to fighting it out because by this means alone could the partition of India be averted.
Mansergh, Nicholas (1999), 'The Last Days of British Rule in India: Some Personal Impressions', in Diana Mansergh (ed.) *Independence Years: The Selected Indian and Commonwealth Papers of Nicholas Mansergh*, 55.
- 53 Padmanabhan, A. (2002), *The Fictional World of Manohar Malgonkar*, op.cit. 110.
- 54 Chandra, Bipan (1999), *India's Struggle for Independence*, op.cit. p. 259.
Chandra, however, adds that:
(...) all the same, they made an abiding contribution to the national freedom movement. Their deep patriotism, courage and determination, and sense of sacrifice stirred the Indian people. They helped spread nationalist consciousness in the land; and in northern India the spread of socialist consciousness owed a lot to them.
- 55 Bhattacharya, Shankar (1994), *Manohar Malgonkar: A Study of His Mind & Art*, op.cit. p. 153.
- 56 Khushwant Singh's comment is self-explanatory: 'Malgonkar, who is more easily readable than any other Indian, may (...) survive [till 2000] with *A Bend in the Ganges*.' Cited in G.S. Amur's *Manohar Malgonkar* (p. 148). R.K. Narayan too is on record as having praised Malgonkar, for as Shankar Bhattacharya tells us in the 'Introduction' to his book, *Manohar Malgonkar: A Study of His Mind & Art*, 'R.K. Narayan, for instance, for whom Malgonkar himself has the deepest of admiration, is reported to have said that Malgonkar is his favourite novelist in English.' (p. 3)

Chapter 2

- 1 Sidhwa, Bapsi (1989), *Ice-Candy-Man*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- 2 Rushdie, Salman & Elizabeth West (eds.) (1997), *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing in English*. London: Vintage.
- 3 Laurel Graeber, 'The Seeds of Partition', *New York Times*, 6 October 1991.

- 4 Montenegro, David (1991), *Points of Departure: International Writers on Writing & Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- 5 'Writer-in-Residence Bapsi Sidhwa Takes Laughter Seriously.' (28 March 1997) Online. *The College Street Journal*. Internet. 2 April 1997. [http://www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/comm/cs/j/970328/sidhwa.html]
- 6 Sidhwa, Bapsi (1989), *Ice-Candy-Man*. New Delhi: Penguin Books. All page references to the text are from this edition, and will subsequently be marked in parentheses.
- 7 Bharucha, Nilufer (1994), 'The Parsi Voice in Recent Indian English Fiction', in Vilas Sarang & Nilufer Bharucha (eds.), *Indian English Fiction 1980-90*, 81. New Delhi.
- 8 Zaman, Niaz (2004), 'Bapsi Sidhwa: "I am Pakistani"', in Rashmi Gaur (ed.), *Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy Man: A Reader's Companion*, 98. New Delhi: asia book club.
- 9 In an informal chat I had with the author on 5 October 2005 at Calcutta's Oxford Bookstore (after the launch of a Penguin book that she had edited – *City of Sin and Splendour: writings on Lahore*), she herself told me that to date, her personal favourite among her own novels is *The Crow-Eaters*.
- 10 Bharucha, Nilufer (1994), 'The Parsi Voice in Recent Indian English Fiction', in Vilas Sarang & Nilufer Bharucha (eds.), *Indian English Fiction 1980-90*, op. cit. 81.
- 11 Cited in Kapadia, Novy (2004), 'Communal Frenzy and Partition: Bapsi Sidhwa, Attia Hosain and Amitav Ghosh', in Rashmi Gaur (ed.), *Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man: A Reader's Companion*, op. cit. 90.
- 12 For a historical attestation of this fact, see Pandey, Gyanendra (2000), *Memory, History and the Question of Violence: Reflections on the Reconstruction of Partition*, 45. Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences. Pandey quotes here a 'letter written a fortnight after the official Partition of India by a Muslim subaltern (non-commissioned-officer) to a fellow-villager or kinsman, about his platoon's "destruction" of Hindus and Sikhs in the villages of the Gurdaspur region.' It goes as follows:
 Whosoever from the Hindus and Sikhs came in front of us, were killed. Not only that, we got them to come out of their houses and ruthlessly killed them and disgraced their womenfolk. Many women agreed to come with us and wished us to take them, but we were out for revenge (...) this Indian government cannot last much longer. We will very soon conquer this and on the whole of India the flag of Pakistan will fly.
- 13 Sudhir Kakkar, in his exploration of how communities fantasize about violence, says that sexual mutilation figures prominently in this, and that the castration of males and the amputation of breasts 'incorporate the (more or less conscious) wish to wipe the enemy off the face of the earth by eliminating the means of reproduction and nurturing.' Cited in Menon, Ritu & Kamla Bhasin (2000), *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, 44. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- 14 Kudchedkar, Shirin L. (1994), 'The Second Coming: Novels of the Partition,' in Vilas Sarang & Nilufer Bharucha (eds.), *Indian-English Fiction 1980-90: An Assessment*, op. cit. 62.
- 15 It may be noted here that it is *after* marrying Ayah that Ice-candy-man undergoes his most incredible transformation in the novel – when he plays out the role of a poet and spurned lover to perfection. It is remarkable the way this happens, even after we take into account Ice-candy man's protean character, his marvellous ability to change his image (popsicle-man, birdman, sufi, government house servant, rogue, raconteur) at the drop of a hat to suit his purpose. As Lenny says at the beginning of the confrontation scene between the Ice-candy man and Godmother in Chapter 29 of the novel:

We absorb his incredible transformation. He has changed from a chest-thrusting paan-spitting and strutting goonda into a spitless poet. His narrow hawkish face,

- as if recast in a different mould, has softened into a sensual oval. He is thinner, softer, droopier; his stream of brash talk replaced by a canny silence. No wonder I didn't recognize him in the taxi.
- 16 Kudchedkar, Shirin L. (1994), 'The Second Coming: Novels of the Partition,' in Vilas Sarang & Nilufer Bharucha (eds.), *Indian-English Fiction 1980-90: An Assessment*, op. cit. 69.
 - 17 Brians, Paul (2003), *Modern South Asian Literature in English* ('Literature as Windows to World Cultures' Series), 106. London & Westport: Greenwood Press.
 - 18 For a discussion of this aspect of the film, see Raisinghani, Neelam (2007), 'Wounded India in Deepa Mehta's 1947: *Earth*', in Jasbir Jain (ed.), *Films, Literature & Culture: Deepa Mehta's Elements Trilogy*, 156-67. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
 - 19 Bahri, Deepika (2008), 'Telling Tales: Women and the trauma of partition in Sidhwa's *Cracking India*', in Gyanesh Kudaisya & Tai Yong Tan (eds.), *Partition and Post-Colonial South Asia: A Reader*, Vol. II, 98. London & New York: Routledge.
 - 20 Menon, Ritu & Kamla Bhasin (1998), *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, 43. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
 - 21 Butalia, Urvashi (1998), *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from India's Partition*. New Delhi: Viking.
 - 22 Ranna's Story – It was inspired by a true incident about which Sidhwa has written in 'New Neighbours'. (11 August 1997) <http://www.pathfinder.com/time/magazine/1997/int/970811/spl.neighbours.html>
 - 23 See Sapra, Rahul (2004), 'A Postcolonial Appraisal of Sidhwa's Fiction', in Rashmi Gaur (ed.), *Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man: A Reader's Companion*, op. cit. 200.
 - 24 Mansergh, Diana (ed.) (1999), *Independence Years: The Selected Indian and Commonwealth Papers of Nicholas Mansergh*, 56. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
 - 25 Lappierre, Dominique & Larry Collins (1976), *Freedom at Midnight*, 323. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.
 - 26 Jeffrey, Robin. 'The Punjab Boundary Force and the Problem of Order, August 1947,' *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1974.
 - 27 Guha, Ramachandra (2007), *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, 29. New York: Harper Collins.
 - 28 Talbot, Ian (1999), 'Literature and the Human Drama of the 1947 Partition', in Ian Talbot & Gurharpal Singh (eds.), *Region & Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent*, 231. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
 - 29 Sahni, Bhisham (1974), *Tamas*. (Translated by Jai Ratan) New Delhi: Penguin, 1988.
 - 30 Talbot, Ian (1999), 'Literature and the Human Drama of the 1947 Partition', in Ian Talbot & Gurharpal Singh (eds.), *Region & Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent*, 231. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
 - 31 Menon and Bhasin's pioneering study offers a detailed critique of the Indian and Pakistani governments' policies regarding the recovery and rehabilitation of abducted women on both sides of the border, and the manifold and unforeseen problems faced by social workers while trying to implement them on the ground.
 - 32 The point to note here is the fidelity to reality that Bapsi Sidhwa maintains in depicting the behaviour of the Parsees in the novel. The sentiments and ideas of Colonel Bharucha represent a prominent social code of behaviour amongst the Parsees. As a minority community in India, they have always venerated loyalty. The 'Jashan' after the Allied Victory in 1945 was no isolated incident. In much the same way, the Parsee community in colonial India had previously also celebrated other events of importance of the British Empire. To cite a few:
 On 16 July 1854, a jashan was performed where about 6,000 Zoroastrians offered prayers for Britain during its war with Russia. As a mark of celebration, a mammoth jashan was organized on Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee on 16 February

1887 and again on 20 June 1897 to commemorate her Diamond Jubilee.

The above list appears in Homi B. Dhallā's 'The Zoroastrian Moral Imperative: Its Relevance in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries', published in Delhi Parsi Anjuman's *Dar-E-Meher* silver jubilee celebrations souvenir, 1986. The quotation has been cited by Niaz Zaman in 'Bapsi Sidhwa: "I am Pakistani"', in Rashmi Gaur (ed.), *Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man: A Reader's Companion*, op. cit. 98.

- 33 Menon, Ritu & Kamla Bhasin (2000), *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, op. cit. 140, 147.

- 34 Going against the stridently critical stance of most historians and creative writers regarding the inadequacy/inefficiency of the new governments of both India and Pakistan to tackle the manifold human problems as a consequence of the Partition, Syed Sikander Mehdi, in an unusual article, gives a very sympathetic account of the various measures undertaken by these governments (individually and jointly) to confront and contain the crisis of 1947. In the said article, he argues:

Another aspect [of the Partition of 1947] begging for special mention is the fact that both the governments of India and Pakistan, headed respectively by Jawaharlal Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan, did work very hard to control post-Partition communal violence, and extensively co-operated with each other to protect human lives, provide shelter to the threatened, arrange rail and road transports with escorts to hundreds of thousands of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus migrating from India to Pakistan and from Pakistan to India. The officials often organized joint patrolling in the most sensitive areas.

Mehdi, Syed Sikander (2003), 'Refugee Memory in India and Pakistan', in Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes & Rada Ivekovic (eds.) (2003), *Divided Countries, Separated Cities: The Modern Legacy of Partition*, 91. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- 35 Bhalla, Alok (2006), *Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home*, 233. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- 36 Incidentally, this is what the film version of the novel, *1947: Earth* (Director: Deepa Mehta. Producer: Jhamu Sughand, 1999) completely misses out on, for it ends with Ayah's abduction, thus leaving out the most unique aspect of the book. It even excludes such an important character as Godmother. In the informal chat that I had with the author on 5 October 2005, at Calcutta's Oxford Bookstore (mentioned earlier in note 9), I asked her whether she was satisfied with the film's interpretation of her novel. She replied that after seeing what had been done to Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (she was referring to Pamela Rooks 1997 film), she felt 'grateful' for the way Deepa Mehta handled her book.

- 37 In their book, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin especially cite the case of Begum Anees Qidwai (sister-in-law of the UP Congress leader Rafi Ahmed Qidwai). Qidwai wrote a book on her experiences, *Azadi ki Chhaon Mein* (Delhi: 1990), that remain a prime source for scholars working on the history of those times.

- 38 There seems to be a certain confusion about the narrative voice in the novel. Paul Brians aptly summarizes it thus:

Many readers have felt that Lenny, the little girl in the book, is too knowing, displaying at times a distinctly adult understanding of her surroundings. Others argue that we are supposed to understand there is a second narrative voice in the novel, the adult Lenny, commenting on matters she had not understood as a child.

Brians, Paul (2003), *Modern South Asian Literature in English* ('Literature as Windows to World Cultures' Series), 104. London & Westport: Greenwood Press.

Sidhwa herself seems to corroborate the latter view in a conversation with Alok Bhalla:

The novel tries to capture a child's memories, but is informed by an adult consciousness. There is a sophisticated adult's interpretation of childhood experiences.

- Bhalla, Alok (2006), *Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home*, 232. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 39 Desai, Anita (1980), *Clear Light of Day*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- 40 Narayan, Shyamala A. & Jon Mee (2006), 'Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s', in Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (ed.), *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*, 318-336. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- 41 Naikar, Basavaraj, 'The Paradox of Time in *Clear Light of Day*', in Suman Bala & D.K. Pabby (eds.) *The Fiction of Anita Desai – Volume II*, 231-32. New Delhi: Khosla Publishing House.
- 42 Chakraverty, Neeru, 'Ambivalence of Choice: A Study of *Where Shall we go This Summer*, *Fire on the Mountain* and *Clear Light of Day*', in (ed.) *Quest for Self-fulfilment in the Novels of Anita Desai*, 103-4. New Delhi: Khosla Publishing House.
- 43 Walsh, William (1990), *Indian Writing in English*, III. London & New York: Longman.
- 44 Rushdie, Salman (1991), 'Anita Desai', *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-91*, 71. London: Granta Books.
- 45 For a fuller discussion of this point, see Pathak, R.S. (1989), 'The Alienated Self in the Novels of Anita Desai', in R.K. Dhawan (ed.) *The Fiction of Anita Desai*, New Delhi: Prestige.
- 46 Cited in Singh, R.A., 'Clear Light of Day: A Four-Dimensional Novel', in Suman Bala & D.K. Pabby (eds.) *The Fiction of Anita Desai – Volume II*, 9-10. New Delhi: Khosla Publishing House.
- 47 In an interview Desai said that 'time is presented as the fourth dimension of human existence' in the novel, and went on to add that *Clear Light of Day* is 'about time as a destroyer, as a preserver and about what the passage of time does to people.'
- 48 Desai, Anita (1980), *Clear Light of Day*, 47. New Delhi: Penguin Books. All page references to the text are from this edition, and will subsequently be marked in parentheses.
- 49 Uniyal, Rani, *The Fiction of Margaret Drabble and Anita Desai: Women & Landscape*, 207. New Delhi: Creative Books.
- 50 Beauvoir, Simone de (1949; 1997), *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage.
- 51 Karuna Chanana, 'Partition and Family Strategies: Gender Educational Linkages among Punjabi Women in Delhi', *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. XXVIII. No. 17. 24 April 1993. Cited in Kumar, Sukrita Paul (2004), *Narrating Partition: Texts, Interpretations, Ideas*, 101. New Delhi: Indialog Publications Pvt. Ltd.
- 52 See, for example, Nicholas Mansergh's essay, 'The Last Days of British Rule in India: Some Personal Impressions', in Diana Mansergh (ed.) *Independence Years: The Selected Indian and Commonwealth Papers of Nicholas Mansergh*, op. cit. 51-70.
- 53 Nabar, Vrinda. 'The Four-Dimensional Reality: Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*', 107. In her essay, Nabar goes on to quote Desai herself on this issue, who, while graciously admitting her limitations as a novelist, defends herself by saying: 'I do restrict myself to writing about people and situations I know or can understand (...) Lack of experience may be a handicap but lack of sensitivity, thought, intelligence or memory would be far greater ones.'
- 54 A comparable example would be Nayantara Sahgal's short-story 'Martand'. (*Contemporary Indian Short Stories in English*, compiled by Shiv Kumar, New Delhi: Sahitya Academi, 2004.) 'Martand' is essentially about love and loss at a time of intense political crisis. The protagonist (who is never named) is a woman who finds herself caught up in a triangular relationship with her husband Naresh (a civil servant) on the one hand, and a doctor, Martand, on the other. The love story is a poignant one. In a few deft strokes, Sahgal successfully portrays the agony of a divided heart as also the beauty of the feeling of love itself. But the singular feature for which 'Martand'

stands out is the way in which it retells the Partition story from the official point of view. In fact, 'Martand' can be usefully discussed keeping Anita Desai's narrative in mind; and remembering that, while Desai in *Clear Light of Day* shows how even common people who were not victimized by communal violence were affected by the Partition, Sahgal actually goes a step further. She gives us, if we may put it like this, the official side of things. We see here the aftermath of the Partition – but from the other side of violence. The focus of the story is not the millions of refugees who were displaced by Partition, but the government officers who had to deal with them. And 'Martand' very effectively conveys their helplessness when faced with this unprecedented crisis – and their (untold) sacrifices.

Chapter 3

- 1 Rushdie, Salman (1980), *Midnight's Children*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- 2 Bradbury also acclaimed the novel's achievement in *The Modern British Novel* (Penguin, 1994) as 'a new start for the late-twentieth-century novel'.
- 3 Mukherjee, Meenakshi (ed.) (1999), *Rushdie's Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings*, 9. New Delhi: Pencraft International.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 5 In his essay, 'Salman the Funttoosh: Magic Bilingualism in *Midnight's Children*' (in Meenakshi Mukherjee ed. *Rushdie's Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings*), Harish Trivedi suggests that in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie, far from giving voice to a continent, actually continues speaking in the master's voice. To quote him, 'To use the master's language is immitigably to speak in the master's voice.' In this essay, Trivedi basically examines the alleged subversiveness of Rushdie's linguistic agenda, and questions the author's claim that 'conquering' the English language through infiltration is a strategic step towards decolonization.
- 6 Walsh, William (1990), *Indian Writing in English*, 122. London & New York: Longman.
- 7 Brennan, Timothy (1989), *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- 8 Harrison, James (1992), *Salman Rushdie*. New York: Twayne.
- 9 Cundy, Catherine (1997), *Salman Rushdie*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- 10 Rushdie, Salman (2003), 'Adapting *Midnight's Children*', *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002*, 79. London: Vintage.
- 11 Brennan, Timothy (1989), *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*, 83. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 84.
- 13 Interview given to Salil Tripathi, for *Celebrity* (India) in May 1983. Reprinted by permission of Salil Tripathi, in Reder, Michael R. (ed.) (2000), *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, 25. Jackson: United Press of Mississippi.
- 14 Rushdie, Salman (1980), *Midnight's Children*, 121. London: Jonathan Cape. All page references to the text are from this edition, and will subsequently be marked in parentheses.
- 15 Kortenaar, Neil Ten (1999), 'Midnight's Children and the Allegory of History', in Meenakshi Mukherjee (ed.), *Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings*, op. cit. 38.
- 16 Montefiore, Simon Sebag (ed.) (2005), *Speeches that Changed the World: The words and stories of the moments that made history*, 120. London: Quercus.
- 17 Interview given to Chandrabhanu Pattanayak, for *The Literary Criterion* (India) 18.3 (1983): 19-22. Reprinted by permission, in Reder, Michael R. (ed.) (2000), *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, 19. Jackson: United Press of Mississippi.

- 18 Bhattacharya, Nandini (2005), *A Love Song to our Mongrel Selves: Problematics of Identity in the Novels of Salman Rushdie*, 219. New Delhi: Worldview.
- 19 The relevant part of Nehru's speech goes:
A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.
- 20 According to Benedict Anderson (in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983), the nation
(...) is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (p. 6)
- 21 For a discussion of this aspect of Rushdie's work (and also its connection with Homi Bhabha's theorizations), see Trivedi, Harish (2000), 'Post-Colonial Hybridity: *Midnight's Children*', in Harish Trivedi & Richard Allen (eds.), *Literature & Nation: Britain & India 1800-1990*, 161. New York: Routledge, in association with The Open University.
- 22 Rushdie, Salman (1991), 'The Riddle of Midnight: India, August 1987', *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-91*, op.cit. p. 27.
- 23 Rushdie, Salman (2003), 'India's Fiftieth Anniversary', *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002*, op.cit. p. 178.
- 24 Rushdie, Salman. 'A Dream of Glorious Return', *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002*, op.cit. p. 195.
- 25 Rushdie, Salman (2003), 'India's Fiftieth Anniversary', *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002*, op.cit. p. 176.
- 26 Pakistan's politicians, in later years, tried to stifle the truth about the real reasons behind the Bangladesh War. A glaring example of such mentality can be found in Benazir Bhutto's autobiography, *Daughter of the East*, where (according to Rushdie's review of the book in *Imaginary Homelands*, p. 57) 'she falsifies Bhutto's role in the events leading to the secession of Bangladesh to a quite scandalous degree (...) [and] places the blame firmly on the shoulders of Sheikh Mujib, the leader of the then East Pakistani Awami League'.
- 27 When it comes to the question of the migration of refugees on the subcontinent, it is important to remember that though both Punjab and Bengal were partitioned in 1947, they traversed very different trajectories as far as the refugee movement is concerned. While the Punjab Partition was a one-time event that was marked by a two-way exodus, the Partition of Bengal turned out to be a continuing process, with migration predominantly happening only in one direction – i.e. from East to West Bengal. At the time of the Bangladeshi War of Independence, however, this migration of refugees (on the eastern border of India) was at an all-time high.
- 28 Rushdie makes this point on page 420 of the novel where he writes:
Religion was the glue of Pakistan, holding the halves together; just as consciousness, the awareness of oneself as a homogenous entity in time, a blend of past and present, is the glue of personality, holding together our then and our now.
- 29 'CUTIA' is a most ingenious acronym coined by Rushdie, as the word in Hindi means 'bitch'.
- 30 Ghosh, Amitav (1986), *The Circle of Reason*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.
- 31 van Schendel, Willem (2009), *A History of Bangladesh*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 32 For the general's own version of the events of 1971, see Niazi, Lt-Gen. (R) A.A.K. (1998), *The Betrayal of East Pakistan*. USA: Oxford University Press.
- 33 The available facts and figures regarding the massacre at Jallianwalabagh are not uniform. According to Dominique Lappierre and Larry Collins in *Freedom at Midnight*

- (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1976), for instance, 'For twenty full minutes, while the trapped Indians screamed for mercy, the soldiers fired. They fired 1650 rounds. Their bullets killed or wounded 1516 people.' (p. 47) Krishna Dutta, in *Calcutta: A Cultural and Literary History* (New Delhi: Lotus/Roli, 2005), however, avers that Dyer's orders on that April day in 1919 ended up '(...) killing some 350 and wounding 1,200 others.' (p. 137).
- 34 The idea that religion is less cohesive a force than culture seems to be a liberal-Muslim perception. Maulana Azad, for instance, wrote in his *India Wins Freedom* (1959; New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1999) that the Partition of 1947 (on the basis of religion) was a 'fraud that had been perpetrated upon the nation.' (p. 230)
- 35 A very detailed discussion of the history of the Language Movement in East Pakistan can be found in Chapter 7 ('Bengali Or Urdu, 1947-54') of Part II ('Two Bengals: A Split Family') of Nitish Sengupta's *Bengal Divided: The Unmaking of a Nation*, New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2007.
- 36 Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee & Aditya Mukherjee (2000), *India After Independence: 1947-2000*, 23. New Delhi: Penguin.
- 37 Ganguly, Sumit (2007), 'The roots of religious violence in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh', in Linell E. Cady & Sheldon W. Simon (eds.), *Religion and Conflict in South and Southeast Asia: Disrupting Violence*, 71. London & New York: Routledge.
- 38 General Tiger Niazi, the commander of the Pakistan forces, surrendered to General Jagjit Singh Aurora, the commander-in-chief of the joint forces of the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini, and not Sam Maneckshaw. This wrong fact is one among several such mistakes (deliberate) in the novel.
- 39 There is a characteristic Rushdian irony here too – for quite astonishingly, the two generals, both victor and vanquished, are shown as meeting in the theatre of war, not with animosity but a kind of old-chum camaraderie and are depicted as speaking nostalgically about their days in the erstwhile British Indian Army. Rushdie makes it seem as if they would much rather have been in the same camp than heading opposing armies. This conversation between the two generals also reminds one of the two friends in Manohar Malgonkar's novel, *Distant Drum* – who (like Sam and the Tiger in Rushdie's novel) were once part of the British Indian army but found themselves in opposite camps in the Indo-Pak war of 1965.
- 40 Gurnah, Abdulrazak (2008), 'Themes and structures in *Midnight's Children*', in Abdulrazak Gurnah (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*, 102. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 41 Khan, Sorayya (2003; 2006), *Noor*. Wilmington: The Publishing Laboratory, University of North Carolina.
- 42 Cilano, Cara (2006), 'Introduction' to Sorayya Khan's *Noor*, xx. Wilmington: The Publishing Laboratory, University of North Carolina.
- 43 Other Pakistani English novels to have engaged with the 1971 War (though with different emphases) are – Hamid, Mohsin (2000), *Moth Smoke*. New York: Picador; and Shamsie, Kamila (2003), *Kartography*. New York: Harcourt.

Chapter 4

- 1 Ghosh, Amitav (1988), *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.
- 2 Conrad, Joseph (1917; 2007), *The Shadow-Line*. New York: Vintage.
- 3 Proust, Michel (1982), *In Remembrance of Things Past*. London: Vintage.
- 4 Ghosh, Amitav (2002), 'The Greatest Sorrow: Times of Joy Recalled in Wretchedness', in *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces*, 314. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.

- 5 Ghosh, Amitav (2002), 'The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi', in *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces*, 60-61. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.
- 6 Hawley, John C. (2005), *Amitav Ghosh* (CIWE – Contemporary Indian Writers in English Series), 8-9. New Delhi: Foundation Books.
- 7 Of the seventeen Indian-English novels that won the Sahitya Academy Award since it was instituted in 1955, *The Shadow Lines*: has been one of the most popular till date, second only to R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, which was the first Indian-English novel ever to win the Award (in 1960).
- 8 It is interesting to note here that the plots of both *Ice-Candy-Man* and *The Shadow Lines*: centre round an irrevocable loss – that of a parent figure/loved one by a child. Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* is to the nameless protagonist of Ghosh's novel what Ayah is to Lenny in *Ice-Candy-Man*. The loss, in both cases, changes the protagonists' lives forever, and it is while coping with this loss that they both learn to come to terms with themselves and their lives. Both actually grow up in the shadow of that loss.
- 9 Kundera, Milan (1978; 1996), *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. London: Faber & Faber.
- 10 Hawley, John C. (2005), *Amitav Ghosh* (CIWE – Contemporary Indian Writers In English Series), 8-9. New Delhi: Foundation Books.
- 11 Bartholomeo's Atlas (and the story of Tristan) is what Tridib bequeaths to his nephew. Tridib had himself described Tristan as 'a man without a country who fell in love with a woman across the seas'. This 'very sad story', which he relates one day to his nephew and niece, could well have been the story of his and May's relationship, as his nephew realizes much later in his adult life. The Atlas and the Tristan story had become an integral part of the narrator's life after Tridib's death, but it takes him a long time to learn the lessons that they have to teach.
- 12 Ghosh, Amitav (2002), *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.
- 13 Ghosh, Amitav (1992), *In an Antique Land*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.
- 14 Ghosh's work clearly has a connection with Subaltern Studies. As Anshuman Mondal has rightly pointed out in his monograph on the author,
Both dimensions of the Subaltern Studies project – its affirmation of the subaltern, and its critique of prevailing conceptions of Indian nationhood – are clearly discernible in most of Ghosh's work, and he has himself acknowledged that they 'came out of a similar moment in the intellectual life of India and that's really been the connection.' (2007: 27)
- 15 Ghosh, Amitav (1996), *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal. One particular passage of the book eloquently sums up this nightmarish phase of modern Burmese history:
It was in 1962 that General Ne Win, the man who would be Burma's long time dictator, seized power in a coup. Almost immediately, he slammed the shutters and switched off the lights: Burma became the dark house of the neighbourhood, huddled behind an impenetrable, overgrown fence (...) General Ne Win was able to render his country invisible to both its neighbours and the world at large. (p. 66)
- 16 Ghosh, Amitav (2000), *The Glass Palace*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal. Burma was one of the major theatres of the Second World War in Asia, and one of Ghosh's outstanding achievements in this novel has been to bring alive the INA chapter of the Indian national movement in it. Incidentally, Ghosh rejected a nomination for the Commonwealth Prize for Literature that he had won for this novel in 2000.
- 17 Ghosh, Amitav (1999), *Countdown*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.
- 18 Ghosh, Amitav (2004), *The Hungry Tide*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.

- 19 In an interview with Sangitaa Advani (of the *Sunday Times of India*) on 11 February 2007, Ghosh admitted that – ‘One of the many continuous threads in my books is the Bay of Bengal – the geology of it, the ecology, the climate, all interest me very much’.
- 20 Ghosh, Amitav (2008), *Sea of Poppies*. London: John Murray. It may, however, be noted here that the first novel to explore this silenced chapter in the history of British Imperialism was Kunal Basu’s *The Opium Clerk* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2001). But though the opium trade features in both novels, the thrust of their narratives are very different.
- 21 It may be noted here that the Calcutta *Ananda Bazar Patrika* editions of 9 and 10 January 1964 do carry reports of communal violence in the two cities of Dhaka and Calcutta, but it is difficult to make out from these reports whether the scale of violence was the same in both places across the border.
- 22 Gopal, Priyamvada (2004), ‘Amitav Ghosh’, in Jay Parini (ed.), *World Writers Series*, 142. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, Thomson Gale.
- 23 Rajan, Rajeshwari Sunder (2002), ‘The Division of Experience in *The Shadow Lines*’, in *The Shadow Lines: Educational Edition*, 296. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 24 Mee, Jon. “‘The Burthen of the Mystery’: Imagination and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*’, in Tabish Khair (ed.), *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, 106. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- 25 Tharoor, Shashi (2001), *Riot*. New Delhi: Penguin India.
- 26 Hawley, John C. (2005), *Amitav Ghosh* (CIWE – Contemporary Indian Writers In English Series), op. cit. 139.
- 27 W.H. Auden, perhaps, best summed up the ironic role that Sir Cyril Radcliffe played in the story of Britain’s final withdrawal from the subcontinent in his poem ‘Partition’, which runs in part:
- Unbiased at least he was when he arrived on his mission
 Having never set eyes on this land he was called to partition
 Between two peoples fanatically at odds,
 With their different diets and incompatible gods.
 ‘Time,’ they had briefed him in London, ‘is short.
 It’s too late for mutual reconciliation or rational debate:
 The only solution now lies in separation...
 He got down to work, to the task of settling the fate
 The maps at his disposal were out of date
 And the census returns almost certainly incorrect,
 But there was no time to check them, no time to inspect
 Contested areas...
 But in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided.
 A continent for better or worse divided.
- Cited by Sugata Bose & Ayesha Jalal (2004), in *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, 165-166. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 28 There is a very poignant passage in Maulana Azad’s *India Wins Freedom* (1959; New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1999), where Azad talks about his first encounter with the dangerous doctrine of reprisals and hostages:
- In the meeting of the AICC, the members from Sind opposed the resolution (namely, the AICC official resolution on Partition, moved on 14th June, 1947) vehemently. They were given all kinds of assurances. Though not on the public platform, in private discussions they were told that if they suffered any disability or indignity in Pakistan, India would retaliate on the Muslims in India.
 When I first became aware of such suggestions, I was shocked. I immediately saw that this was a dangerous sentiment and could have the most unfortunate and far-

reaching repercussions. It implied that partition was being accepted on the basis that in both India and Pakistan, there would be hostages who would be held responsible for the security of the minority community in the other state. The idea of retaliation as a method of assuring the rights of minorities seemed to me barbarous. Later events proved how justified my apprehensions were. The river of blood which flowed after partition on both sides of the new frontier grew out of this sentiment of hostages and retaliation. (p. 216)

Azad's eloquent lament of such a doctrine was written soon after the Partition. What he did not know then (and could not have foreseen) was that this doctrine would become an almost permanent feature of subcontinental politics for the next fifty years.

- 29 For a comprehensive history of the concept of 'Nationalism', see *Nationalism* (Oxford Readers Series), edited by John Hutchinson & Anthony D. Smith (Oxford University Press: 1994).
- 30 Kaul, Suvir (2002), 'Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in *The Shadow Lines*', in *The Shadow Lines: Educational Edition*, 278. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 31 Mee, Jon. "'The Burthen of the Mystery": Imagination and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*', in Tabish Khair (ed.), *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, 106. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 94-95.
- 33 This phrase, used by Thamma, in a moment of great agitation, echoes the words of Ghosh himself in his celebrated essay, '*The Imam and the Indian*' (the title essay in *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces*):

At that moment, despite the vast gap that lay between us, we understood each other perfectly. We were both travelling, he and I: we were travelling in the West. The only difference was that I had actually been there, in person: I could have told him about the ancient English university I had won a scholarship to, about punk dons with safety pins in their mortar-boards, about superhighways and sex shops and Picasso. But none of it would have mattered. We would have known, both of us, that all that was mere fluff: at the bottom, for him as for me and millions and millions of people on the landmasses around us, the West meant only this – science and *tanks and guns and bombs*. (p. 11) (emphasis added)
- 34 Gera, Anjali (2003), '*Des Kothay?* Amitav Ghosh tells Old Wives Tales', in Tabish Khair (ed.), *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, 118. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- 35 Mukherjee, Meenakshi (2002), 'Maps and Mirrors: Co-ordinates of Meaning in *The Shadow Lines*', in *The Shadow Lines: Educational Edition*, 265. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 36 Kaul, Suvir (2002), 'Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in *The Shadow Lines*', in *The Shadow Lines: Educational Edition*, 280. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 37 Ghosh, Amitav (2004), *The Hungry Tide*, op.cit. p. 254.
- 38 Anderson, Benedict (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso. It may also be pertinent to mention here that in an interview with Amitav Ghosh on 22 July 2005, I asked the author whether Anderson's book informed his vision in any way while he wrote *The Shadow Lines*. He replied that he had not read the book then, implying thereby that there was no question of any kind of influence and in fact, went on to ask me *when* Anderson's book was published.
- 39 Chatterjee, Partha (1999), 'Whose Imagined Community', *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, 5. New Delhi: Oxford University Paperbacks.

- 40 Gera, Anjali (2003), 'Des Kothay? Amitav Ghosh Tells Old Wives Tales', in Tabish Khair (ed.), *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, 110. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- 41 Kaul, A.N. (2002), 'A Reading of *The Shadow Lines*', in *The Shadow Lines: Educational Edition*, 301. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 42 Gera, Anjali (2003), 'Des Kothay? Amitav Ghosh Tells Old Wives Tales', in Tabish Khair (ed.), *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, 110-111. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- 43 Dixon, Robert (2003), "'Travelling in the West": The Writing of Amitav Ghosh' in Tabish Khair (ed.), *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, 20. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- 44 Kaul, A.N. (2002), 'A Reading of *The Shadow Lines*', in *The Shadow Lines: Educational Edition*, 303-304. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 45 Mee, Jon "'The Burthen of the Mystery": Imagination and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*', in Tabish Khair (ed.), *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, 100. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- 46 Cited in Hawley, John C. (2005), *Amitav Ghosh*, op.cit. p. 125.
- 47 Bose, Brinda (ed.) (2003), *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives* ('New Orientations' Series). New Delhi: Pencraft International.
- 48 Mondal, Anshuman (2007), *Amitav Ghosh* (Contemporary World Writers Series), 7. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 35.
- 50 Tagore, Rabindranath (1917; 2002), *Nationalism*. Calcutta: Rupa & Co.
- 51 Interview given to Rahul Sagar for *The Hindu*, 16 December 2001.
- 52 There is a very comprehensive discussion of this aspect in 'After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s' by Jon Mee (2006), in Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (ed.), *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*, 318-336. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- 53 Mukherjee, Meenakshi (2002), *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*, 184. New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks.

Conclusion

- 1 A very concise and insightful study of the main trends and issues that shaped the development of this unique body of literature over two centuries can be found in the 'Introduction' of Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna (ed.), (2006), *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*, 1-28. New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks.
- 2 For a detailed discussion of this point, see Mee, Jon (2006), 'After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s', in Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (ed.), *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*, 318-336. New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks.
- 3 Indeed, this is one aspect that Indian-English fiction shares with many bhasa literatures of India. As Meenakshi Mukherjee observes in *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 2002):
 (...) writers in at least four languages of the country (Hindi, Urdu, Bangla and Punjabi) have gone back again and again to this rupture to understand our present. (p.180)
- 4 Bose, Sugata & Ayesha Jalal (2004), *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 5 In an interview given to P.K. Singh in 2005, Khushwant Singh spoke candidly about his Partition experience:
 Partition was a traumatic experience for me. I had gone to Lahore expecting to live there, to become a lawyer or a judge (...) then to be brutally torn out and never really being able to go back. That was what put me to writing (...) and I wrote

- Train to Pakistan*. I had no intention of becoming a writer.
- Singh, P.K. (2005), *The Novels of Khushwant Singh: A Critical Evaluation*, New Delhi: Book Enclave.
- 6 *Clear Light of Day* clearly goes beyond Anita Desai's own professed aims and compulsions as a writer. She has been on record saying:
- Writing is to me a process of discovering the truth – the truth that is nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call Reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth (...) my novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics, or character.
- Cited in Narayan, Shyamala A. & Jon Mee (2006), 'Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s', in Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (ed.), *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*, 227. New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks.
- 7 As Sukrita Paul Kumar says:
- Those women who survived the partition riots emerged with a greater existential autonomy. Not only did they accord space to themselves for growth, they also created in themselves the enterprise for independent living. 'Re-membering Woman: Partition, Gender and Reorientations', in Ravikant & Tarun K. Saint (eds.) (2004), *Narrating Partition: Texts, Interpretations, Ideas*, 99. New Delhi: Indialog Publications Pvt. Ltd.
- 8 Rushdie would later expand on these very themes in his next two novels – *Shame* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), which are located, once again, in Karachi and Bombay, respectively. The former chronicles the sad tale of Pakistan's contemporary history, while the latter laments the irrevocable loss of the Bombay of Saleem's childhood.
- 9 The most memorable picturization of refugee trains can be found in Richard Attenborough's 1982 Oscar-winning film *Gandhi*.
- 10 It is interesting to note that many of Amitav Ghosh's novels are framed around an uncle-nephew relationship. Apart from Tridib and the narrator in *The Shadow Lines*, we also get an uncle-nephew pair in *The Circle of Reason* (Balaram/Alu) as well as *The Hungry Tide* (Nirmal/Kanai). It is also noticeable that a kind of primacy is given to this relationship in all these novels, where it is almost prioritized over all others. In delineating such relationships, Ghosh is being culturally accurate, as the uncle-nephew relationship (be it *mama/bhagne* or *kaka/bhaipo*) is a very popular strand of male bonding in Bengali social life.
- 11 Aristotle (Translated by Ingram Bywater) (1974), *On the Art of Poetry*, 43. London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press.
- 12 Lukacs, George (Translated by H. Mitchell and S. Mitchell) (1962), *The Historical Novel*, 42. London.

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