WITNESSING PARTITION
Memory, History, Fiction

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Witnessing Partition
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Contents

Acknowledgements vii

Introduction 1

Negotiating the Effects of Historical Trauma:
Novels of the 1940s and 50s 61

Partition’s Afterlife: Perspectives from the
1960s and 70s 115

Narrativising the ‘Time of Partition’:
Writings since 1980 179

Short Stories about the Partition: Towards a
Self-Reflexive Mode of Testimony 240

Reinventing Testimonial Fiction in the
Wake of the Partition 294

Bibliography 309

Index 334
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The partition of India, one of the most traumatic and disruptive events of the twentieth century, ushered in an era of uncertainty and dislocation following widespread collective violence, rape, arson and the displacement of millions of refugees across South Asia. Hitherto neglected aspects of this catastrophe, especially the experience of abducted women and divided Muslim families (for many of whom ‘the long partition’ remains a reality of everyday experience, as Vazira Zamindar argues), have been addressed in recent times, reconfiguring the historical archive. ¹ The basis for some of this questioning of prior assumptions about the historical experience of 1947 has been a revisiting of the literature of the partition. This corpus of writing has provided illuminating insights regarding the moral and psychic economy underpinning the near-genocidal violence that took place during 1947–48, as well as about the resistance to ideological formations that propagated such violence. *Witnessing Partition* focuses on literary representations of the partition, which, I will argue, offer crucial insights into the traumatic effects extreme violence has had on the collective psyche and imagination over time. Through contextual readings I hope to indicate the potential of selected texts, primarily novels and short stories, to stand as testimony to the horrors of collective violence. ²

Major novels and short stories in English and in translation from Hindi, Urdu and in some instances, Punjabi, that negotiate

¹ Zamindar provides an incisive account of the permit systems that were put in place in 1948 before passports were introduced by the two newly born nation–states, and the consequent problems of identity definition for many Muslims with relatives on both sides of the border. See Vazira Fazila–Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. See especially pp. 1–18, 79–157.

² As we shall see, the study critiques the propensity to be influenced by dominant ideologies, as well as aestheticising/identitarian tendencies
public as well as personal memories of the historical experience of the partition in North and Northwest India are discussed in the chapters to follow. Critical accounts of the partition and its afterlife in the social sciences provide the point of departure for the subsequent argument about the different strategies of representing the partition in literary writings across three generations from India and Pakistan.3 Theoretical debates dealing with history, memory, witnessing and trauma are invoked as I situate significant fictional

in fictional representations of the partition across three generations. I do not, however, attempt a detailed analysis of the problems with the composition of testimonial voice in autobiographies, memoirs and other forms of life writings, or for that matter in interviews with survivors, even though I allude to important and sometimes ambivalent instances of such ‘witness accounts’ at various stages in the argument. My concern is rather with the interplay between the different registers of personal and public memory as encoded in fictional representations, survivor recollections and historical accounts. Kamra’s discussion of autobiographies and fictional texts about the partition as ‘psychotestimonies’ is pertinent in this regard, though with a different emphasis, which at times entails a too rapid sliding between witness accounts and fictional representation. See Sukeshi Kamra, Bearing Witness: Partition, Independence and the Raj, New Delhi: Roli, 2002, pp. 165–200.

The experience of the partition in the East has been insufficiently addressed in partition historiography and literary criticism. However, this imbalance in partition studies has begun to be redressed in recent times. The major differences in historical memory and literary depictions of the event bring up questions that are beyond the scope of this study, which focuses on the specific context of the near-genocidal levels of violence in North and North-west India. For collections of stories about the Eastern experience of the partition, see Debi Sengupta ed. Mapmaking: Partition Stories from Two Bengals, New Delhi: Srishti, 2003 and Niaz Zaman ed. The Escape and Other Stories of 1947, Dhaka: The Univ. Press Ltd, 2000, as well as Zaman’s comparative analysis of novels about the partition, including novels from the East. See Niaz Zaman, A Divided Legacy: The Partition in Selected Novels of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000. Joya Chatterji has made an important recent contribution to the historical debates on this subject, especially with reference to the experience of West Bengal’s Muslim minorities. See Joya Chatterjee, The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–67, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 (rpt 2008), pp. 159–208.
portrayals of the partition experience in context as modes of testimony that sought to articulate the inarticulable.

The difficulties of bearing witness in literary form to the catastrophic dislocation of the partition are highlighted, as well as the fraught nature of such attempts to reconstruct traumatic and sometimes ambivalent memories of the event. Unlike a testimony in a court of law that becomes the basis for judgment in time-bound cases, I will argue that ‘fictive’ testimony as a paradoxical mode of truth-telling may achieve a resonance beyond the immediate context of suffering and trauma to which the writer bears witness. Derrida has shown how in its very attempt to exclude the possibility of fiction, dissimulation, perjury and the lie, legal testimony remains haunted by literature. Important novels and short stories about the partition, I will contend, draw on literary precedents as well as the resources of individual and collective memory to make at times, oblique testimonial statements in a situation in which justice was rendered only partially. ‘Fictive’ testimonies articulate the tragic plight of refugees, and at times also chart the slippery moral terrain (the ‘grey zone’) traversed by victims turned perpetrators. The prevalence of such ambivalent states of being may have been one of the consequences of the speeding up of the processes leading up to the partition, unanticipated by many, leading to both panic and an evacuation of moral restraint during the violence. It is the existence of the grey zone that makes the turn to memory a fraught move; hence the need for a critical testing of it, which the best writing on the partition does enable. Such counter-narratives allow for the voicing of alternative perspectives and a reckoning with some of the more

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4 See Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida. The Instant of my Death and Demeure: Fiction and Testimony, trans. Elizabeth Rottenburg Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994 (rpt 2004), pp. 29–30. As Derrida puts it with reference to the European juridical tradition, ‘testimony should remain unrelated to literature, and especially, in literature, to what presents itself as fiction, simulation, simulacra, which is not all literature’ (Blanchot and Derrida, The Instant of My Death and Demeure, p. 29). Nonetheless, the possibility of the parasitic discourse of fiction reappearing is structurally implicit in testimony, he argues. If testimony became proof, information, certainty or archive, it would lose its function as testimony. Hence testimony must allow itself to be haunted by the possibility of literature, that which it otherwise excludes from its innermost depths.
unpalatable and even grotesque aspects of the partition experience and its aftermath.

The literature about the partition may be considered a corpus of writing based on the centrality of the events of 1946–47 or its later repercussions as a theme. However, it was only after several anthologies appeared in the 1990s that a degree of coherence was established regarding this body of writing (insofar as criticism in English is concerned). While novels and stories about communal relations and violence had appeared earlier, the collective violence

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5 One of the first major collections of writings on the partition in English, including criticism and fiction, was published in 1976. See Ramesh Mathur and M. Kulasrestha, eds. *Writings on India’s Partition*, Calcutta: Simant, 1976.

during the partition was of an unprecedented magnitude and intensity. The issue of how and what to represent in the midst of the ruins of civilisational values was not easy to resolve, especially given the imperatives of nationalist self-definition in India and Pakistan. Attempts to represent partition violence as well as the long-term effects of historical trauma in narrative form, nevertheless, generated distinctive modes of testimonial fiction. Indeed, writing about the partition generated a descriptive language to depict not only physical violence, but also the breakdown of communication between communities. The treatment of violence of different kinds of intensity in such texts is further evidence of the presence of crucial differences between collective violence during the partition and earlier episodes of communal violence. In addition to this significant fiction written in the aftermath of the partition registered, to a greater or lesser degree, the near impossibility of representing the experience of the partition in its totality.

To explain this difference it is necessary to reiterate, first, that the scale and magnitude of partition violence was unprecedented.

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Up to one million people were killed, ten to twelve million were displaced and thousands raped or abducted. In certain regions the killings approached a genocidal level of intensity, especially in the Punjab area, with ethnic cleansing practised to clear entire districts of minority populations. Second, the attacks on women and children, including the inscription of slogans on women’s bodies as part of the orchestrated violence against the ‘other’ community, indicated that organised barbarism was becoming increasingly heedless of consequences or the possibility of future reprisals. There were further devastating effects on pluralist practices and syncretic forms of culture and civilisational memories that sought to preserve such practices and forms. The ‘Ganga–Jamni’ Indo-Islamic cultural amalgam produced over centuries of mingling of cultures was

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10 For an extended analysis of issues linked to syncretic cultural traditions in South Asia, especially with reference to the recent threat posed by the rise of the Hindu right in India, see various essays in Hasan and Roy eds. M. G. Vassanji depicts the accelerated destruction of spaces such as the shrines of the Khoja Ismaili pirs in Gujarat during the anti-Muslim violence in 2002 in his novel *The Assassin’s Song*. See Vassanji, *The Assassin’s Song*, New Delhi: Viking, 2007.
severely damaged by partition violence. Characterised at its best by a combination of elements from different religions, as in the case of popular places of worship such as Sufi shrines, this amalgam was further diminished by the forced departure of many of its living exponents, including writers such as Intizar Husain, to Pakistan.

Furthermore, the question of coming to terms with partition violence in the public domain was generally downplayed, even as the task of nation-building was prioritised in its aftermath. Nationalist historiography in both India and Pakistan displayed a marked silence about the reciprocal violence during the partition. Formal as well as informal codes of censorship and the predominance of official and authorised versions of the past often drove storytelling about such violence underground. Within displaced families a taboo regarding sharing partition experiences persisted, even as salacious stories continued to circulate. While the shock of being at the receiving end of atrocities led to psychological numbing for many survivors, a kind of excess marked the outpouring of accounts of violence in the public domain. This ‘pornography of violence’ was characterised by a preoccupation with cataloguing instances of debasement and degradation, often with a vicarious investment in horrific episodes involving women from the other

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11 For an elaboration of this notion of the cultural amalgam, see Memon’s Introduction to Intizar Husain’s *Basti*, trans. Frances Pritchett, New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1979, p. xvii, as well as the discussion of this novel in Chapter Three. Kabir argues that ‘cultural trauma’ tore the tissue of Indian society and demanded a rethinking of the relationship between individual and society in post-partition experience in South Asia. See Ananya Jahanara Kabir, ‘Gender, Memory, Trauma: Women’s Novels and the Partition of India’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, 1 (2005): 180.

12 Shahid Amin’s work on the cult of Ghazi Miyan, the nephew of Mahmud of Ghazni, reminds us of the emergence of alternative histories of syncretic spaces that also come to terms with the history of conflict. Amin is critical of an exclusive focus on the syncretism of such cults; in his view such cults also entail narrative refashonings of conquest. See Shahid Amin, ‘On Retelling the Muslim Conquest of North India’ in Partha Chatterjee and Anjan Ghosh eds. *History and the Present*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002 (rpt 2006), pp. 24–43.
community. The narcissistic and sadistic tendencies in such stories were symptomatic of a large-scale breakdown of social and moral norms. This was not merely confined to goondas or hooligans since middle-class society was complicit in this process, as Manto’s short stories indicate.

Writers engaging with such disturbing after-effects of partition violence devised various strategies of representation. Dealing with unspeakable experiences of depravity and hitherto unimaginable forms of evil often generated an anxiety about representation. While there is a self-consciousness about such anxiety in a great deal of writing, clichéd and banal stories about violence, often couched in terms rendered familiar by nationalist frames of reference, abound as well. However, the experience of loss consequent to migration and displacement also generated important reflections on exile and the long-term impact on civilisational memory and syncretic forms of culture. This study argues that though modes of testimonial fiction appeared coeval with partition (of which Manto’s writing is the best example), the imperative to bear witness to the effects of multiple kinds of violence, both physical and psychological, continued to underpin the best writing on the partition. With the passage of time

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14 For Das and Nandy it was important to realise that the only people who retained the memory of good and evil were the impersonal witnesses, even as the whole society was tied in a unanimous pact of violence. As they argue, the victims were not killed for themselves, for they were merely the medium through which this pact was concretised. For them, it was Manto who created the form through which the deafening silence accompanying the trauma of being simultaneously the subject, object and instrument of violence could be represented. See Veena Das and Ashis Nandy, ‘Violence, Victimhood and the Language of Silence’ in Veena Das ed. The Word and the World: Fantasy, Symbol and Record, New Delhi: Sage, 1986, pp. 193–94.
the residue of historical trauma was negotiated in nuanced ways, as new representational techniques were devised so as to come to terms with the shadow of the partition’s afterlife.\textsuperscript{15}

This ‘afterlife’, referring to the repetitive, intrusive tendency of memories of partition violence, is partly a consequence of the inability to achieve any form of resolution with respect to the injustices perpetrated then. In contemporary India and Pakistan there are continued references to the ‘unfinished business’ of the Partition, especially but not only with reference to Kashmir.\textsuperscript{16} The use of communal or sectarian rhetoric reminiscent of the riots and killings in the Partition era in both India and Pakistan is a reminder of the failure to achieve reconciliation between estranged communities. Furthermore, the emergence of a culture of impunity and complicity with respect to later instances of massacres of minority groups in India such as the anti-Sikh pogrom in 1984, the Bombay riots in 1992–93 and the Gujarat violence in 2002 can in part be traced back to the failure to come to terms with the ghosts of 1947 and the miscarriages of justice that accompanied the birth of these two

\textsuperscript{15} As Kaul suggests, the destructive legacy and nightmarish memories of the partition, its afterlife, still guide public policy and inhibit our progress from a colonial state to post-colonial democracies. In his view, selective memorialisation led to the production of authorised histories sanctioned by the state and its institutions, or by smaller social collectivities. See Introduction in Suvir Kaul ed. \textit{The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India}, Delhi: Permanent Black, pp. 2–3.

\textsuperscript{16} For example, Sarila discerns a causal link between long-term British strategies that contributed to partition processes at the time and contemporary events in the region, including the rise of ‘jihadi’ forces in Kashmir. The problems with this account are discussed later in the Introduction. See Narindra Singh Sarila, \textit{The Shadow of the Great Game: The Untold Story of India’s Partition}, New Delhi: Harper Collins, pp. 330–401. For an iconoclastic treatment of the predicament of Kashmir in novelistic form that traces the tragic breakdown of the notion of Kashmiriyat or shared Kashmiri culture back to the partition years, see the first part of Salman Rushdie, \textit{Shalimar the Clown}, London: Jonathan Cape, 2005. Also see Andrew Whitehead, \textit{A Mission in Kashmir}, New Delhi: Viking, 2007, for an account of the genesis of the Kashmir conflict based on extensive interviews with survivors, including nuns who survived the attack by tribal raiders on the Baramulla convent preceding the first Indo–Pak war.
nation states, India and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{17} The impact of the historical trauma of 1947 continued to reverberate in the individual as well as the collective memory. The literature about the partition provides crucial evidence regarding the changing contours of the terrain of recollection.

Early writing on the subject of the Partition was often impelled by the ethical imperative of coming to terms with the suffering of survivors. Raw narratives about barbaric forms of violence were followed by serious attempts to take up issues of the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims into society.\textsuperscript{18} Further introspection led to the acknowledgement of historical wrongs and the culpability of different communities. Gandhian ideals of non-violence often animated efforts to achieve reconciliation between communities, especially in the wake of Gandhi’s assassination.\textsuperscript{19} However, crude forms of nationalism, often drawing on ideologies based on religion, also played a significant role in the first decades after independence.

\textsuperscript{17} Das cites the anthropological work of Mehta and Chatterji in Dharavi, Mumbai; their informants reported to them that Hindu mobs dragging away a group of Muslim women in Dharavi during communal violence in 1992 shouted ‘We are taking away your Pakistan’. See Veena Das, \textit{Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary}, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{18} For a discussion of some of the early raw narratives in Urdu, as well as later narratives in which a deeper reflection on social, cultural and civilisational questions became possible, see Ahmad, ‘Some Reflections on Urdu’, \textit{Seminar} 359 (1989): 27.

\textsuperscript{19} Bhalla argues that the idea of home in partition fiction is often underpinned by Gandhian ideals, including the notion of acceptance of difference. See Introduction in Alok Bhalla, \textit{Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home}, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–74. In an earlier account, Erikson makes a brilliant analysis of the prolonged identity crisis that afflicted Gandhi, who may have been beset with guilt and the sense of an inescapable existential curse. Erikson shows how Gandhi had the pertinacity and the giftedness of being able to re-enact this in a medium communicable to his fellow men and in a way meaningful in their stage of history. Erikson emphasises the idea of re-enactment, beyond the concept of repetition, which characterises symptoms and irrational acts. As he suggests, the mark of a creative re-enactment of a curse is that its communal experience becomes a liberating event for each member of an awe-stricken audience who are transformed in the act of witnessing. Erikson sees such
despite the official stance of secular nationalism in India. The writings of the 1940s and 50s were thus often imbued with a high degree of emotionalism or an overtly ideological stance, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Two. Writers who were directly affected by the dislocations of the period 1946–48 attempted to articulate their responses to this tragedy in different ways. They were followed by a second and third generation of writers, who carried the burden of memory as inscribed and transmitted by parents and other members of the family, even as fresh episodes of violence provided further evidence of the continuing effects of historical trauma.  

**Histories of Partition, Old and New**

The shift in emphasis in partition historiography, away from the study of archival materials relating to the transfer of power and a creative re-enactment in Gandhi as autobiographer and as leader, while acknowledging the distinction between his re-enactments in writing and re-enactments in action. See Erik Erikson, *Gandhi’s Truth: On the Origins of Militant Non-Violence*, New York: Norton, 1969, pp. 132–33. Erikson’s argument is also suggestive in the context of Gandhi’s later assumption of personal guilt on account of the overwhelming failure of his philosophy of ahimsa during the years before the partition that led him into the hinterlands of Noakhali, the riot-hit slums of Calcutta and eventually, after several botched assassination attempts, to his death at the hands of a Hindu fanatic in January 1948. The subsequent transformation of a near-civil war like situation across India and Pakistan into one of relative calm bears out this reading of Gandhi’s ultimate sacrifice and public articulation of his refusal to countenance violence, to which the people of the two nation-states bore witness.  

In Stephan Feuchtwang’s opinion, both inscription and transmission are necessarily destructive as well as creative transformations of personal memory into history and monument. Intergenerational transmission of memories is intimate and parental, and like history and tradition, there is the authority of a life-giver or a fate, a haunting carried in the formation of habits and anxieties. He suggests that the process of recognition and omission is likely to be gendered as well, with different kinds of transmission by men and women, even as female transmission is less likely to be acknowledged or accommodated by public commemoration. See Stephen Feuchtwang, ‘Loss: transmissions, recognitions, authorisation’ in Sussanah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin eds. *Regimes of Memory*, Oxon: Routledge, p. 65.
high politics has been enabling for scholars across disciplinary boundaries. New perspectives have included a greater sensitivity to refugee experience, often based on oral testimony and literary sources, including popular source materials. For example, in an important anthology published in 1995, Hasan brought together short stories, excerpts from longer fiction, memoirs and witness accounts to give a better sense of the human dimension of the partition. However, recourse to diverse source materials and the

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22 For a discussion of the recent turn to popular sources in Indian historiography, with specific reference to debates as regards history and memory, see Partha Chatterjee’s Introduction in Chatterjee and Ghosh eds, *History and the Present*, pp. 19–23. Pierre Nora’s influential ideas with respect to the replacement of memory-history as a form of collective remembrance in the realm of the popular by (often nation-centred) forms of historical consciousness, with the advent of modernity, are elaborated in his general introduction. See Pierre Nora, ‘General Introduction: Between Memory and History’, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, pp.1–23.

consequent reconstitution of the historical archive is a recent phenomenon. 24

Earlier historical accounts, focusing mainly on the causes of the Partition differed widely in their explanations, especially when dealing with partition massacres. Colonialist historiography often sought to ascribe the reasons for the outbreak of widespread communal/sectarian violence to the resurfacing of antagonistic primordial identities after the presumably benign phase of colonial rule. 25 For example, we may turn to The Great Divide by W. V. Hodson, a former adviser to Lord Linlithgow. Hodson argues that in later

the gap between two generations of Sindhi migrants based now in Kolkata. This memoir describes recent peace initiatives undertaken by the women’s movement in South Asia, during which the author was able to visit her family’s former hometown in Sindh. See Kavita Panjabi, Old Maps and New: Legacies of the Partition — A Pakistan Diary, Calcutta, Seagull, 2002 (rpt 2006). Also see Kuldip Nayar’s description of his experiences during the partition years, including his account of an encounter with Jinnah in Lahore in 1945; Kuldip Nayar, Inside Stories from the Partition to the Present, New Delhi: Harper Collins, pp. 17–44. Some of these personal narratives are marred by nostalgia and a tendency to romanticise the past, or too obviously attempt a balancing act in their rendering of partition violence. The narrative by Fikr Taunsvi with its satirical tone and unsparing irony stands out as an exception. See ‘The Sixth River: A Diary of 1947’ in Salim, Lahore 1947, pp. 13–28.

24 As Talbot suggests, historians have increasingly turned to literature and oral sources to unlock the human emotions that were underplayed in earlier studies as regards constitutional decision-making, or regional studies. See Talbot and Tatla, Epicentre of Violence, p. 5. In 2006 an initiative to set up a people’s archive has been floated by scholars at Jadavpur University under the aegis of the Revisiting Partition Programme, which is to include oral accounts as well as a fictional archive and a cinematic archive. An unusual aspect of the proposed archive is the creation of sibling archives in the three countries most affected by the partition, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Personal communication, Sudeshna Banerjee.

decades the British did not foster Hindu–Muslim divisions (6). Indeed, Hodson’s remark that no ruler can divide and rule unless the people are willing to be divided and ruled is an obvious attempt to rebut contrary claims by nationalist historians (16). His account ends with an appraisal of the role of Lord Mountbatten, the last Governor General, in which he ascribes the bloodshed during the partition to the ‘inflammation’ of communal emotions for many months (535). Ultimately, it was centuries’ old Hindu–Muslim rivalry for power that was really at stake, in Hodson’s account (542–43). Such writing about communal violence by former administrators is often characterised by the use of metaphors drawn from medical practice, as Deepak Mehta points out.26 The vocabulary of ‘outbreaks’ and ‘inflammation’, presumably to be contained through palliative measures undertaken by a benign administration, is a recurrent feature of such descriptions of communal violence that on occasion also filters into literary representations, as I will show in Chapter Two.

Nationalist historians made significant departures from such deterministic accounts, often stressing the ‘divide and rule’ policy of the colonial masters. However, nationalist history writing had a tendency to overemphasise negotiations in the sphere of high politics leading up to the transfer of power. In the process of underlining the heroic role of the leadership in the final phase of struggle towards self-rule, the extent and magnitude of collective violence and its effects on the common man were often elided.27 Indeed, this concern with causes and the role of individual leaders often led historians in the newly formed nation–states to resort to the rhetoric of blame. Jinnah, the architect of the ‘two-nation


the villain of the piece for several Indian historians. Many Pakistani historians deemed ‘Hindu’ leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru responsible for the failure to ensure parity and protect the rights of the minority community in the envisaged independent nation-state.\(^{28}\)

Such tendencies persist even today. In a study based on recently declassified documents, Sarila tries to show how the colonial administration’s need for a buffer state in the North-west between the Soviet Union and India played a crucial role in shaping policy decisions leading up to the partition. For Sarila, former ADC to Mountbatten, the logic of the Great Game and the perception that India might not join the Commonwealth led to the cultivation of the Muslim League and acquiescence in the demand for Pakistan.\(^{29}\) The existence of Pakistan as a Muslim buffer state, according to this projection by British analysts, might forestall growing Soviet influence on the Subcontinent. This view of British policy as a function of geo-political designs and planning to maintain British hegemony in the region after withdrawal underlines strategic imperatives that marked the endgame of colonial rule. However, his approach to the subject follows the well-trodden path of speculation regarding the role of individual colonial and nationalist leaders based on reports by British officials. Anxieties about the ‘anti-Hindu’ leanings of the British and general observations about the misplaced idealism and lack of experience of nationalist leaders like Gandhi and Nehru result once again in facile attribution of blame. The machinations of the empire builders and their manipulation of puppets such as Jinnah explain away the catastrophe of the partition as a consequence of imperial strategy, as in many previous accounts.\(^{30}\) Such writings reinforce the continued need for


\(^{30}\) Ibid., pp. 65–96.
non-partisan forms of history writing, as well as narratives from people’s experience that can adequately come to terms with the suffering undergone by millions.

For an understanding of the historical processes that culminated in massacres, rape, abduction, arson and extensive damage to property, as well as massive displacement of large numbers of people from both sides of what was designated the Radcliffe line, studies by Mushirul Hasan, Ayesha Jalal, Gyanendra Pandey, Ian Talbot, Anders Hansen, Indivar Kamtekar and Vazira Zamindar and collections of essays edited by Suvir Kaul, D. A. Low and Howard Brasted, as well as S. Settar and I. G. Gupta are useful. The historiography of the partition, as mentioned earlier, has shifted focus from political history to questions related to social and cultural history, and historians have begun to disaggregate the multiple identities involved, in order to better come to terms with the event as perceived by ordinary people. After an emphasis on divide and rule, ‘high politics’ and the role of the leadership, especially that of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Jinnah, or on the factions in the parties associated with the nationalist movement, there has been a reconsideration of the multi-causal dimensions of processes leading up to the partition.

As Gyanendra Pandey argues, the context for rethinking in the domain of historiography in India was, for one, the drift away from the Nehruvian vision of a modern, secular welfare state in the 1970s and the consolidation of right-wing, religious community-based politics, which for many secular intellectuals in India was not unlike the politics of the Pakistan movement of the 1940s. A series of pogroms through the 1980s against Muslims, peaking in 1992–93 and the anti-Sikh massacres in 1984, reminded many scholars of the moment of the partition, with the entrance of barbarity into middle-class life. In Pandey’s view the chasm between the historians’ understanding of the events of 1947 and the more popular survivors’ accounts, between history and memory, needs to be bridged. He argues that nationalist historiography has made too facile a separation between the partition and violence. The historians’ focus on the new constitutional arrangements neglected wide-ranging effects, including a sundering and thus a radical reconstitution of community and history, as Pandey suggests. While some of the theoretical issues considered by Pandey with respect to the writing of history are outside the purview of this study, his suggestion that the history of the partition needs to be reconsidered with reference to the different terms and conceptions that went into the making of the Partition is pertinent. The hardening of religious identity definitions in terms of being Hindu, Sikh or Muslim has spilled over into the post-partition period, with Muslim localities being described as ‘little Pakistans’, even during times of normalcy and the persistence of the ‘Sikh problem’, especially after the splitting of Punjab left the Sikh community with the perception of being orphans. The Punjabi Suba movement of the 1950s and 60s and Khalistani movement of the 1970s and 80s derived in part

32 Le Goff, on the other hand, points out that memory is not history but one of its objects, and an elementary level of its development. This view provides a necessary caution with respect to the role of memory in historical debates. See Jacques Le Goff, History and Memory, trans. S. Randall and E. Claman, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 129.

33 Pandey, Remembering Partition, pp. 5–7.

34 Ibid., pp. 13–15. Vernacular terms such as batwara, vibhajan and taqseem, as well as mara-mari (killings), raula, hullar (disturbance) were often used to refer to partition violence.
from a consolidation of such sentiments. Furthermore, the state continued to deal with the problem of minorities, whether Sikh, Muslim or Christian, in the light of the ‘lessons’ of the partition. Indeed, military coups in Pakistan were justified on the basis of the unfinished work of the partition.\textsuperscript{35} Pandey’s influential account has opened up space for a further interrogation of the pieties of nationalism and has reinforced the important work done by independent researchers working with survivor accounts.

Besides Pandey’s criticism of the absence of adequate reckoning with violence in mainstream histories of the partition and work towards a subalternist history of the partition (referred to above), Ayesha Jalal has problematised the conventional understanding of the role of Jinnah, as well as of any monolithic construction of the Muslim community as ‘communal’ in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{36} Mushirul Hasan has reconstructed the myriad lost voices of the ‘nationalist’ Muslims and dissidents within the Muslim community, as well as spaces of intercommunity coexistence such as the qasbas or localities.\textsuperscript{37} Vazira Zamindar has sensitively documented the implications of the partition for Muslim families divided by the event and subjected to governmental protocols and permit systems in its wake.\textsuperscript{38} Furthermore, historical/anthropological accounts of the partition based on memories of survivors, especially but not only women who were abducted during the violence by Urvashi Butalia,\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., pp. 15–17. Pandey’s summary of the events leading up to the partition includes a differentiation between the ‘three’ partitions of 1947. The first is the Muslim League’s demand for Pakistan from 1940s onwards, while the second entailed the splitting up of the Muslim majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal, especially after the Sikh and Congress leaders were persuaded that the partition was necessary as a ‘lesser evil’. Finally, the third partition took place when panic broke out with the advancing of the date of independence and partition; massive migrations across the border followed. Ibid., pp. 21–44.

\textsuperscript{36} See, for instance Jalal, ‘Exploding Communalism’, \textit{The Sole Spokesman}, \textit{Self and Sovereignty}.


\textsuperscript{38} See Zamindar, \textit{The Long Partition}. 
Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, Veena Das, Ashis Nandy, Shail Mayaram, Papiya Ghosh and Ian Talbot and D. S. Tatla constitute important new perspectives. Some of the critical questions addressed by such research, which also reveals the extent of sexual violence during the partition, are discussed at greater length in Chapters Four and Five. These studies have retold the partition story from the point of view of those hitherto marginalised and silenced in accounts of the ‘heroic improvisations of the new states in rehabilitation efforts’.

From such ‘new’ histories one can glean a comprehensive sense of the mutual incomprehension and mistrust between the Congress and the Muslim League during the last days of the British Raj, and the way this percolated down to the people, despite widespread dissent and resistance to communal/sectarian ideologies. Some historians look back to British imperial policy in the nineteenth century and the legacy of the ideas of Syed Ahmad Khan on one hand and Dayanand Saraswati (founder of the Arya Samaj) on the other to track the hardening of religious identity-defin

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41 In a critical discussion of the significance of Syed Ahmed’s ideas, Jalal argues that his message to his co-religionists was to keep religion and politics on separate tracks, since he was against religious bigotry. However, his arrogant belief in the superiority of ashraf culture led him to disregard the Muslim ajlaf classes in his statements on electoral representation of the community, which was in accordance with the British view of the Indian Muslim community as unified. In her opinion, Syed Ahmed’s rejection
demand for separate electorates institutionalised in the Morley–Minto reforms of 1909. David Page traces the increasing hostility and distrust between the communities back to the 1930s after the entente of the Khilafat agitation, in the wake of the publication of the Nehru committee report (1928) that marked a sea change in the relationship between the two major groups. But it is demonstrable that the 1940s was the decade when parleying for power amongst the leader became increasingly acrimonious, especially after the Muslim League’s declaration that a separate Muslim ‘nation’ called Pakistan was their stated goal at the time of the Lahore convention in 1940, when the resolution to this effect was passed. Parties like the Unionists in Punjab and the Krishak Praja Party in Bengal lost their social base in the 1940s, paving the way for further polarisation. The return of many soldiers from the battlefronts of Europe, especially in the Punjab, as Kamtekar and Hansen show, led to a situation in which extremists of various shades effectively militarised the respective communities. Moderate and liberal opinions were sidelined in the process. Paramilitary organisations such as the RSS on the Hindu Right, the Muslim League’s National...
Guards and the Sikh Akal Saina and *shahidi jathas* enhanced their power and standing, whipping up hysteria and fear regarding the ‘other’.

After the failure of the Cripps Mission and the 1946 Cabinet Mission Plan, Jinnah declared Direct Action Day on 16 August 1946, the first ‘extra-constitutionalist’ action of the Muslim League. During the infamous ‘Calcutta killings’ several thousands died in a spurt of bloody violence and counter violence. After this, 300 were reported killed in Bombay in early September. The slaughter of several hundreds in Noakhali in East Bengal in early October was a further instance of targeting of the most vulnerable, including Hindu women and children. Violence against Muslims in Bihar began in late October in which several thousands lost their lives. Further killings in Garhmukhteswar in Uttar Pradesh in November were followed by violence in the Northwest Frontier Province in January 1947 and, worst of all, in the Punjab. Rawalpindi and its surrounding areas in March 1947 saw planned executions and killings take place, even as volunteer armies amongst the different communities amassed armaments including sophisticated weaponry and munitions.

As uncertainty regarding the date for the partition continued and the post-war Labour government headed by Attlee, after appointing Mountbatten as the last Governor-General, brought forward the date of the transfer of power from June 1948 to August 15, 1947, tensions grew. The task of drawing the borders of the two nation-states was assigned to Cyril Radcliffe, a lawyer with little understanding of Indian society or the complex interconnections between communities in India.

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This culminated in the worst phase of deadly attacks on trains carrying refugees who sought to flee their homeland as uncertainty grew. Due to the delays in the announcement of the exact contours the Radcliffe line would follow, tensions grew in communities living in close proximity, especially along the proposed boundary. A phase of ethnocide and near genocide followed, in which Hindus and Sikhs were ‘cleansed’ from the western part of Punjab and Muslims ‘cleansed’ from the eastern part of Punjab, except in Malerkotla. The image of the long caravans of refugees carrying their meagre possessions across the border became a defining metaphor for the times. The violence continued until the assassination of Gandhi in January 1948, even as he strove through personal intervention and extended fasting to bring about a cessation of violence, especially in Noakhali and Calcutta. For Gandhi the partition represented the vivisection of India, a metaphor that acquired resonance as the numbers mounted. As mentioned earlier, at least one million people are estimated to have died, while ten to twelve million people were displaced from their homes and became refugees on both sides of India, in the North and Northwest and in the east as eastern Pakistan was carved out of what was once undivided Bengal. Butalia cites statistical evidence which suggests that about 75,000 women were abducted and raped and/or murdered by men of different (or their own) religions.

50 As Khan argues, the scramble to calculate population ratios reduced individuals to crass statistics, which denied the varied complexities of friendship, community and life. See Yasmin Khan, The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan, New Delhi: Viking, 2007, p. 108.

51 On Gandhi’s alternatives to the proposal for a vivisected nation, see Pyarelal, Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase, vol. 2, Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1958, pp. 315–20. Gandhi’s response to a press note issued by the Partition Council stating that the partition was to be effected in a ‘brotherly spirit’ was as follows: ‘I am afraid we are deceiving ourselves and the people’. Pyarelal notes that experience had taught Gandhi to be sceptical of such platitudes. Quoted in ibid., p. 295. Mountbatten acknowledged Gandhi’s role in pacifying Bengal, describing him as a ‘one man boundary force’ accomplishing what 55,000 men could not in the Punjab. Ibid., p. 382.

52 The number of people killed varies from hundreds of thousands to one million in different accounts. See Pandey’s discussion of different estimates in Remembering Partition, p. 68.

53 See Butalia, The Other Side of Silence, p. 100. As Talbot points out, Butalia’s work emphasising the denial of women’s agency, especially
Partition’s Afterlife

Suvir Kaul underscores the culpability of state authorities, even as borderlines and boundaries that were once flexible or porous underwent a process of hardening. As he suggests, various state-agencies compelled people to choose between one nation and the other, or one religious and identity and another, or made the choice for them. Such stories did not make it to the official accounts of the partition. On the other hand, certain versions of the stories were told so often that they became part of the official memory of the event.53 Thus each time the story of the partition is taught in such a way as to demonstrate Jinnah’s guilt or the sole culpability of the Muslim League and the role of the religious chauvinists within the Congress or other political and social organisations ignored, the divisions signified by the partition are further deepened.54 Kaul cites the often-used metaphor for the pain of the partition as birth pangs of two new nations and underlines the need to understand how the lives of the children of violence were shaped by the circumstances of their birth better. In the more belligerent version of such a metaphor, the claim that all nations are founded in blood and that porous boundaries are sealed only through violence led to a belief that sacrificial bloodletting is necessary for the making of strong nation states. Kaul argues that the vocabulary of martyrdom is an important feature of such an understanding, which makes the deaths that take place meaningful and the guilt that ensues less onerous, thus legitimising militarism and war.55 Kaul’s analysis of

53 Other Side of Silence, has initiated further academic interest in approaches to the partition ‘from beneath’. See Talbot, The Epicentre of Violence, p. 5.

54 Kaul is critical of a notion of humanism that concentrates only on the pain and sorrow of the ‘human condition’ that resulted from the partition and that fails to come to terms with the political and civic fault lines revealed then, of religion, gender, caste and class, fault-lines that still run through our lives. He underlines the way in which the partition defamiliarised the everyday, and utterly changed the familiar relation between self and society. See Kaul, The Partitions of Memory, p. 5.

55 Ibid., pp. 3–8. The three major wars fought by India and Pakistan and the recent Kargil conflict bear this out. Furthermore, in the case of Pakistan as Jalal argues, the embattled politics of Pakistan’s Islamic ideology scuttled the possibility of a consensus on national identity. After the failure of the Pakistani state’s language policy and the break-up of
the ways in which state-sponsored pedagogic practices and officially authorised accounts of the Partition contributed to an entrenchment of hostility between the two nation–states as well as between the communities until the late 1990s indicates the continuing importance of partition memories to contemporary modes of identity construction.

The fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence was also the fiftieth anniversary of the Partition, a further impetus to scholarship that expressed in no uncertain terms its distrust of the official narratives generated by the nation–state. The ‘new’ histories often take their cue from subversive questions and issues raised in novels and stories that dealt with perceptions and experiences neglected in official versions or silenced, if at all present, in the official archive. An instance of this silencing is the fact that 15,000 interviews of refugees from Punjab, Sindh and the North-west Frontier Province conducted by the Fact Finding Organisation headed by G. D. Khosla still remain confidential and shut away from public scrutiny. This constitutes an absence in the public archive that

Pakistan, it became evident that religion alone could not be a unifying factor, although the military-bureaucratic state attempted to both keep Islamicists at bay and use the Islamic card to win popular appeal amongst a culturally distinctive and economically disparate people. As she shows, the inefficacy of the Pakistani state’s use of religion is borne out by the fact that electoral results consistently showed up the weak appeal of Islamic ideology in politics. The self-professed proclaimed soldier of Islam Zia-ul-Haq left behind a legacy of intensified regional, linguistic and sectarian tensions. See Jalal, ‘Exploding Communalism’, p. 99.

56 For instance, see Kaul, The Partitions of Memory, p. 5.

57 Le Goff applauds historical fiction that inventively uses history, but also cautions against the tendency for everyone to become a historian. See Le Goff, History and Memory, p. 130. His position is especially pertinent with respect to historical fiction that claims to be based on documentary evidence, but that often resorts to stereotypes or ideologically loaded descriptions. This problem will be addressed at greater length with respect to novels of the 1950s, as well as some examples from the 1980s and 90s, in Chapters Two and Four.

58 Even accredited historians such as Pandey could not access these records. Personal communication, Pandey. The implications of this closing away of such memories to public access will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Five.
continues to haunt the collective imagination. Later attempts have been made to partially reconstitute this archive through truncated/fragmentary family histories by individual researchers who, however, work with memories excavated fifty years after the event, a problem discussed in Chapter Four.

The psychological trauma resulting from the catastrophic event as well as the perception of an absolute failure of cherished ideals has bedeviled postcolonial experience in the Subcontinent and acted as a constant source of friction between the major communities as well as between the two nation-states, India and Pakistan. The writings of Sa’adat Hasan Manto, Intizar Husain, Attia Hosain, Abdullah Hussein, Bhisham Sahni, Anita Desai, Krishna Baldev Vaid and others remind us of the difficulty of representing violence of this order and its uncanny after-effects. The question of the appropriate form in which to represent not merely the horrific violence itself but also its afterlife, especially in terms of consequences discernible at the psychological level, often manifested in family relationships as delayed trauma, has been crucial for writers as well as critics. This has in turn led to the recovery of memories of specific localities.

Frozen Time and Mutilated Language

Veena Das argues with respect to the Punjab that there has been a silence surrounding the violence done to and by people in the context of the partition. While the generation that left Lahore would on occasion remember certain aspects of life in the partition

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59 Stephan Feuchtwang defines archive as a term for the authoritative storing and inscription of memory. Psychically, the archive is a reworking and an impression on previous memory, yet it is that by which memory is lived: censoring, repressing, but also directing and sorting lived memory. See Feuchtwang, ‘Reinscriptions’, p. 64.

60 Talbot argues that concerns with the patterns of violence, refugee rehabilitation and gender identity are addressed through such studies, as in the case of his recent book based on interviews with respect to the context of Amritsar. See Talbot, Epicentre of Violence, p. 5.

days, any spontaneous reference to atrocities done, witnessed or suffered during the partition was rarely allowed to surface. Das suggests that there is a quality of frozen slides in such accounts of the violence of the Partition. On one hand, there are descriptions of collective self-immolation in the face of threat to women’s chastity, plotted in a heroic narrative that resembled mythological models such as Padmavati, who chose death over dishonour. Das shows that such stories framed violence so that it could be assimilated into the culture’s experimentation with the edges of human experience, confirming codes of masculinity and appropriate behaviour for women to safeguard honour. Then there were stories whose authorship is unknown, tales primarily about brutalities toward women, framed by an anonymous collective voice, ‘it was heard those days’. Das suggests that these general stories about rape and abduction created the force-field in which later narratives move. She contrasts the violence within the weave of life in the kinship universe with sudden and traumatic violence during the partition in which experience seems to be frozen. As Das argues, time cannot perform its work of writing, rewriting or revising in the case of such violence. The implications of this argument for the representation of time in partition stories are taken up in Chapter Five. At this point one may note that fictional representation was shaped within such a context of frozen experience.

Das also shows that a certain mutilation of language becomes visible in the stories written about the Partition, especially Manto’s stories about the riots. She suggests that as understanding gives way, language is struck dumb. The relapse into a dumb condition is not just a sign of the period but part of the terror itself, a violence that annihilates language and a terror that can not be brought into the realm of the utterable. In Das’ view, the inscription of the slogans of the respective communities on the genitals of women, referred to by writer Khwaja Ahmad Abbas was a means of controlling the future. As Das argues, it was not enough that the new nations have new names or territory; the inscription of these names on the body demonstrated the correspondence of the political history of the creation of two nation-states with another history, ‘that of the secretly

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63 Ibid, pp. 67–68.
64 Ibid., p. 68.
65 See Das, Critical Events, p. 184.
carried memory of terror upon the “secret” organs of women’. Even if women were not actually marked on their bodies with such slogans, male fantasies represented Muslim women abducted by Hindus and Sikhs as carrying the marks of ‘Jai Hind’ on them, which would act as reminders to their own men that the future of this pak or ‘pure’ country was forever marked by the impurity of their women. A similar claim was made regarding the inscription of ‘Pakistan’ on Hindu and Sikh women’s bodies to show men that the enemy had claimed their most precious possession. The bodies of women, Das suggests, thus became the signs on which the violent dialogue between men was conducted. The body did not simply develop its own idiom and memory in response to violence and trauma as an act of representation; the appropriation of the body of the victim to create memories through the infliction of pain was itself an important component of the terror. This argument, which further extends the findings of independent researchers, is pertinent for the discussion of some of the important stories in Chapter Five that deal with the experience of abducted women such as Amrita Pritam’s ‘Pinjar’ (trans. ‘The Skeleton’), which exemplify the disjunction between language and body that resulted from traumatic experiences of violence.

Furthermore, as Stephan Feuchtwang suggests in his discussion of the difference between erased and new memory, the demonisation of people who can be distanced and have a history of having been distanced is often given a racial or ethnic character, which fixes and licenses their victimisation, adding to or prolonging a political or economic crisis. In the context of the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom,
Das argues that the narrative’s ‘unfinished’ character meant that the event lived on in different versions in the social memory of different social groups. Rumours regarding the crisis of state or collapse of order ensured that the earlier suspicion and circulation of stories suddenly acquired a new kind of insistence and obstinacy. In Das’ terms, such zones of emergency are marked by diffused images of an unfinished past, as well as by efforts to void the other of all subjectivity in a world populated by a phantasmagoria of shadows. As we shall see, partition writings often register the persistence and circulation of such phantasmal images from the past in problematic ways. Such images often became the trigger for irrational acts of violence, impeding the possibility of reflection. In partition literature, attempts to come to terms with the phantasmal afterlife of the partition often takes the form of a splintered view or double take, looking to the past even while addressing problems in the present.

Collective violence during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, the 1992–93 riots in Bombay and the Gujarat pogrom of 2002 drew on a climate of mediatised religiosity often predicated on the circulation of selected images of the other, drawn from sedimented memories of partition conflicts. Indeed, such stereotypes may be markers of frozen time. As Mehta shows with respect to the experience of the 1992–93 riots in Bombay, stereotypes establish a well-determined place for speakers and listeners by identifying the Muslim as alien. Furthermore, the community of Muslims is isolated and put into abstract space, dissociated from daily life and everyday practices. Stereotypes are thus separated from passing time and occupy the fiction of a past time. In times of collective violence, as Mehta argues, the function of stereotypes is to move from the didactic to the practical. The inability to work through memories of near-genocidal levels of violence has contributed to the failure to achieve reconciliation, whether in India with respect to Hindus and Muslims and communal conflicts, or in Pakistan with respect to sectarian conflict, also based on differences of

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71 Ibid.
language and community. Indeed, such memories could easily be displaced through the attribution of blame to the ‘other’ community or nation at times of crisis.\textsuperscript{73}

**Partition Violence and its Antecedents:**
**A Writer’s Viewpoint**

In a recent conversation with critic Alok Bhalla, Hindi writer Krishna Baldev Vaid makes the important point that the Punjab was shadowed by communal tensions for a number of social, economic and political reasons in the pre-partition period (125).\textsuperscript{74} He speaks of a perception even as children that certain cracks existed somewhere in the heart of society.\textsuperscript{75} In his novel *Guzra Hua Zamana* (trans. *The Broken Mirror*) it is the children rather than the adults who are fully conscious of the presence of these cracks and are afraid. In his view the crisis of 1946–47 could not have been avoided, given the cracks that had appeared in the ‘composite culture’.\textsuperscript{76} Rather than a more explicit sense of hostility or a genocidal tendency, there

\textsuperscript{73} Sudhir Chandra’s account of stereotypes of Muslims as cruel and aggressive in nineteenth century Hindi literature is pertinent in this context. He suggests that this ambivalence towards ‘the Muslim’ and the period of Islamic rule was characteristic of a strand of Indian nationalism. See Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 116–54.


\textsuperscript{75} We may be reminded here of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and the cracks that appear in the protagonist Saleem Sinai’s person, an allegorical representation of fissures in society. See Ananya Kabir, ‘Subjectivities, Memories, Loss: Of Pigskin bags, Silver Spittoons and the Partition of India’, *Interventions* 4, 2 (2002): 256.

\textsuperscript{76} See Vaid, ‘Krishna Baldev Vaid in conversation with Alok Bhalla’, pp. 126–27. Shahid Amin is critical of histories that miss out on the creation of the composite culture as a process; see Amin, ‘On Retelling the Muslim Conquest’, pp. 29–31.
was a muted crisis, exemplified in an accentuation of the taboos in society with respect to Muslims. Dietary taboos as well as taboos regarding sexuality, particularly with reference to intercommunity relationships, were a long-standing problem, even though sexual affairs did take place between Hindus and Muslims, sometimes on account of contrariness, and the consequent compulsion to break the taboo (127–28).

The Hindus did not eat with the Muslims, or buy food from their shops, while the Muslims had no dietary taboos vis-à-vis the Hindus. This asymmetrical application of defilement taboos led to a lingering sense of hurt and resentment. Both communities had strong sexual taboos and guarded the honour of their women very strongly. In the process, ghettos were created, a phenomenon that has persisted into independent India. In Vaid’s view, such cracks appeared as soon as economic, social and political issues came to the forefront, from the question of the separate electorates onwards. According to him, rather than dealing with the demand in a forthright fashion, the leaders dealt with it in a sentimental way. In his view, Gandhi’s position was sentimental as well, although temperamentally he was not so inclined.

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78 The motif of the cross-border romance recurs in many of the novels about the partition, as we shall see, especially in Chapters Two and Three. However, in most cases such romances are depicted as doomed to tragic failure, reflecting the pessimism in the air as regards intercommunity relationships. For a discussion of the romance-across-the-political-divide structure in the case of literature about the Irish and Palestinian experiences, see Joe Cleary, Literature, Partition and the Nation State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 110–19.

79 Sethi has analysed the workings of such defilement taboos in detail. I refer to his work in Chapter Two. See Sethi, ‘The Creation of Religious Identities’, unpublished dissertation.

80 Alok Bhalla has a different view of Gandhi’s position with respect to the partition and communal violence. According to him, Gandhi’s moral and political philosophy and his belief in the goodness of God never wavered, even at a time when religious hatred had filled every street with horror, in August 1947. For Gandhi, notions of a ‘Hindu’ or a ‘Muslim’ India were nothing more than a ‘superstition’ which had to be eradicated from peoples’ hearts. He thus continued with his recitation of the Kalma at his prayer meetings even at times when Hindu and Sikh crowds demanded
Vaid further argues that the partition demand should never have been accepted at any cost, for the bloodshed that might have followed would not have been on the scale that did happen once it was accepted. As he suggests, even at that time there would have been people who would have accepted the existence of differences, rather than asserting that everything was ‘peachy’ between the two communities; such awareness was not incompatible with non-violence. Indeed, the dietary division amongst Hindus and Muslims may have been one of the most important reasons why the Muslims desired a separate homeland. According to Vaid, Hindus need to accept responsibility for the partition while Muslims must divest themselves of memories of once having ruled India.  

This courageous admission of culpability on the part of a major Hindi writer, highlighting the role of day-to-day humiliations on account of economic divisions and defilement taboos in contributing to the build-up in Punjabi Muslim society of the demand for Pakistan has perhaps received insufficient attention. Later research by historians has confirmed the existence of such commensal practices, as well as the partial nature of reforms within Hindu society in the Punjab.

In Vaid’s view, the writing on the partition seems to fall into a pattern too easily, often describing the tensions between the communities and then seeming to shout ‘a pox on both your houses’. What redeems this fiction according to him is an absence of hatred.  He speaks of the fact that his writing confined itself to memories of the town Dinga, near Gujarat in West Punjab in which he was born; yet Vaid hoped to achieve novelistic generalisations applicable to the larger society.  The cracks apparent in society

that he stopped reciting from the Koran. Bhalla shows how Gandhi stressed elementary civility as the crucial component of intercommunity relations, without which any conception of righteousness would be misplaced. See Bhalla, Introduction, Partition Dialogues, pp. 48–50.


82 During the colonial era commensal distinctions largely based on caste identity were further reinforced on communal lines, especially after processes of enumeration led to a consolidation of concepts of religious community. I am indebted for this idea to discussions with Shail Mayaram and Anil Sethi. Also see Sethi, ‘The Creation of Religious Identities’.


84 Ibid., pp. 122, 141.
are there in his novel as well and appear as reflections in a broken mirror. This ambivalence in the working of memory is exemplified in Vaid’s novelistic reconstruction of childhood memories of the partition experience.85 (The novel is taken up for detailed discussion in Chapter Four). In Vaid’s terms, the later difficulties that he went through as a refugee were not traumatic; it was the actual partition that caused the trauma.86 Das’ argument about the frozen quality of time and experience may help to further explain the sense of psychological numbing in Vaid’s novel, which belatedly bears witness to the cataclysmic dislocations in Punjab in 1947, although it was written in 1981.

Varied narrative strategies and modes of figuration appear in writings about the partition. There are fictional accounts that attempt a documentary style description. In other writings we find oblique gestures towards loss and trauma, circling around a silence at the core. The absence of public memorials to the victims of the partition, in contrast to the extensive memorialisation of the Holocaust, is significant in this regard. For many decades neither of the two nation–states attempted to symbolically commemorate the million dead in the form of a monument.87 Furthermore, there was a virtual breakdown of mourning rituals in the public sphere, as

85 As Richard Terdiman observes, memory is simultaneously constituted by historical processes, as well as constitutive of collective identity, and emerges as fraught in terms of its effects through time. Terdiman’s caution with respect to the ‘malignancy of the mnemonic’, which may take on a pathological character in the form of involuntary memory, is pertinent in this context. As Terdiman argues, when not tempered by forgetting, there is a deeply unsettling side to memory. Indeed, remembering without forgetting could be dangerous, while hypermnesia might be an illness with dire consequences. Terdiman’s insights into the way in which the ‘memory crisis’ of modernity has impinged on modernist narrative structures, as exemplified by the fiction of Proust, which attempts ‘liberation’ from memory, are significant in this regard as well. See Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, New York: Cornell University Press, pp. 196–98. Proust’s novel *Remembrance of Things Past* was in turn an important influence on Vaid. See Vaid, ‘Vaid in conversation with Bhalla’, p. 122.


87 According to Yasmin Khan, the inauguration in Lahore in 2005 of a building project that will become the Bab-e-Pakistan memorial to
Das points out. Instead of the possibility of continued engagement that might lay to rest ghosts of the past through processes of societal healing leading to ‘principled forgetting’, there has been, as Nandu suggests, a systematic avoidance of the problem. This has contributed to the propensity to acting out traumatic symptoms that Freud associates with melancholia.

**History, Memory and Trauma**

Debates in the sphere of memory work and trauma studies, especially those dealing with traumatic memory stemming from cataclysmic events, have often emphasised the displaced nature of Pakistan’s ‘heroes’, and the Martyrs Monument in Chandigarh are the nearest to any official recognition of the suffering of refugees. See Y. Khan, *The Great Partition*, pp. 200–1.

88 See Veena Das, ‘Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain’ in Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock eds. *Social Suffering*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, especially pp. 82–89. In a different context, it is notable that a museum commemorating the dead of the 1971 freedom struggle (in which the atrocities then committed by the Pakistani army during the partition of Pakistan feature prominently) has been constructed in Bangladesh. Heaps of human skulls and bones as reminders of the sacrifices made during this struggle are on display in the War Memorial Museum in Dhaka, which became operational on 22 March 1996. See Verma, *Aftermath*, lxii. Intizar Husain ruefully observes that this may also be a sign of a refusal to forget and move beyond this historical memory. Personal communication.


symptoms and the return of repressed memory.\textsuperscript{91} The domain of oral history has prompted some of the most interesting analyses of memory work as an alternative to archive-based history.\textsuperscript{92} Luisa Passerini argues ‘[I]t may be that our attempt to retrieve memories… can contribute to the emergence of freer cultural attitudes and the instatement of the problem of freedom at the centre of history’.\textsuperscript{93} For the purposes of this study, work done on the specific arena of traumatic memory, often generated by cataclysmic events, and the way in which limit events such as the Holocaust problematised the method of recovery of memory, both in survivors’ accounts and in fiction, is of particular interest.\textsuperscript{94}

Psychoanalytic perspectives drawing on the insights of Freud have emphasised the proximity of recovered memory to fantasy in the case of such survivors of traumatic events. The liminal quality of such recovered memories in which, as Radstone puts it, there is a holding of equivocation, becomes visible during such cataclysmic ruptures, which plunge identity into crisis at the individual level as well as that of the community.\textsuperscript{95} The phenomenon of repetition and acting out of trauma alluded to earlier as a manifestation of the persistence of trauma in melancholic form has been of interest to critics and analysts examining such formations of memory in the collective realm. Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia has been crucial in this regard.\textsuperscript{96} While mourning is often associated with the possibility of healing and working through,
melancholia is marked by a fixation on the traumatic event and the resultant acting out of displaced symptoms. Narrative strategies in partition fiction in certain instances allow for a transformation and working through, a re-membrance, rather than mere reproduction of traumatic memory in either banal or fantastical forms.\textsuperscript{97}

As Sturken suggests, Freud’s work has been significant in problematising the concept of forgetting and shifting the focus from the reasons why memories are retained to what memories are hiding.\textsuperscript{98}

The phenomenon of infantile amnesia, that we remember nothing from our infancy and the fact that childhood memories are so often of exceptionally ordinary and indifferent material, struck Freud in particular. The idea that these memories may actually have displaced more charged emotional memories led him to the concept of ‘screen memory’, one that substitutes for other memories too painful or disturbing to retrieve. In Sturken’s summary of Freud’s formulations, forgetting is an active process of repression that demands vigilance and is designed to protect the subject from anxiety, fear, jealousy and other difficult emotions. In her view, this notion of screen memory is useful in analysing the ways in which


Le Goff, citing Piaget, makes the following criticism of Freudianism: the past which the psychoanalytic experience grasps is not a true past, but a reconstructed past. Piaget agrees with Erikson in his view that the past is reconstructed in relation to the present just as the present is explained by the past. ‘There is interaction... But then how can this past be known? Through memories that are themselves reconstituted in a context, which is the context of the present and in relation to this present.’ Quoted in Le Goff, \textit{History and Memory}, p. 16. Such a view provides a corrective to the determinism of certain ahistorical psychoanalytic accounts. This formulation becomes pertinent in relation to novels in which memories of the past are inevitably coloured by the present. In Le Goff’s terms, one of Freud’s most important contributions is the emphasis on the notion of the censorship of memory. See Le Goff, \textit{History and Memory}, p. 94.

a culture remembers through its representations, mnemonic aids that may also effectively block other memories that are more difficult to represent.99 Indeed, instances of this are recurrent in ‘official’ representations of the partition; hagiographic accounts of the role of the leaders during the freedom struggle often function as screen memories. At the same time, cultural memory in South Asia has found it difficult to forget the violence of the partition, the memory of which inevitably seems to resurface at times of crisis when communal/sectarian polarisation is at its height.

The problem of persistence of traumatic memory and the crucial significance of survivor testimony has been at the forefront of discussions of the ‘Final Solution’, as exemplified in numerous studies in recent times, such as that of Levi, Friedlander, Lifton, Felman and Laub, Caruth, and LaCapra amongst others.100 In her important collection of essays Trauma: Explorations in Memory, Cathy Caruth shows how post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a response to overwhelming events, though sometimes delayed.101 PTSD is a phenomenon that takes the form of repeated intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviour stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. The pathology of PTSD lies in its structure of experience, insofar as that the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it.102

99 Ibid., p. 8.
102 Ibid., pp. 4–5.
To be traumatised is thus, according to Caruth, to be possessed by an event. The traumatic symptom cannot simply be interpreted as a distortion of reality, or as the lending of unconscious meaning to reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what was once wished. The enigmatic core of trauma lies in its insistent return true to the event, accompanied by the delay or incompletion in knowing an overwhelming occurrence. In Caruth’s terms, the truth of traumatic experience is not that it is a pathology of falsehood or displacement of meaning, but rather of history itself. She argues that this enigma at the core of traumatic experience is of crucial concern, since the greatest confrontation with reality may actually occur as an absolute numbing to it. Immediacy then, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness.

In a critical assessment of Caruth’s emphasis on repetition, Das makes the important point that regions of the past may be actualised in different and complex ways, whether through rumour or in the singular ways in everyday life through which lives are knitted together. This argument brings in a salient anthropological perspective, a necessary caution with respect to the uncritical deployment of models of trauma and witnessing taken from Holocaust studies. Nonetheless, later works of partition fiction such as Desai’s _Clear Light of Day_ and Vaid’s _The Broken Mirror_, I will argue in Chapter Four, are important attempts in literary form to negotiate the residue of unclaimed traumatic experience, often focusing precisely on the domain of the everyday. In such texts about the aftermath of partition the enigmatic nature of traumatic history achieves oblique recognition, as do its belated effects.

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103 Ibid., pp. 4–5.
104 Ibid., p. 6.
105 See Das, _Life and Words_, pp. 102–3.
106 Also see Caruth, _Unclaimed Experience_, pp. 1–8. In these novels we find further evidence of what Kamra terms ‘reverberations’ of the partition trauma across time. Kamra speculates as regards whether a (partially) culturally specific rhetoric of trauma might emerge through a reading of testimonials in a culture in which individualism does not have a pervasive hold. See Kamra, _Bearing Witness_, pp. 167–68. The social and cultural coordinates that modulate the individual experience of historical trauma become visible in novels of Desai and Vaid, as well as a novella by Amrita Pritam, amongst others, as we will see later.
Witnessing and Trauma: Modes of Testimony

Some of the most sensitive and insightful work on witnessing and trauma has emerged from dialogues with Holocaust victims whose testimony has been extensively recorded. An example of this is the work of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, who address the continuing relevance of survivors’ trauma. The next generation must in turn reckon with this experience, possibly through identification and a subsequent negotiation of witness trauma. Felman stresses the uniqueness of testimony as a burden borne alone by the witness; as the poet Paul Celan wrote, ‘no one bears witness for the witness’.107 There is thus an element of solitude about the activity of bearing witness, the responsibility of which must be borne alone. In her argument, however, the appointment to bear witness is one that causes a paradoxical transgression of the confines of isolation, as one speaks for others and to others. Felman quotes Elie Wiesel’s suggestion that testimony is the literary or discursive mode par excellence of our times. ‘If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony’.108 Felman and Laub emphasise the role of such texts in necessarily leading to a reinscription and rethinking of issues of biography and history. In their account, the question of the witness and of witnessing becomes an estranged conceptual prism through which to come to terms with the ways in which existing cultural frames of reference and pre-existing categories, which delimit the perception of reality, have failed both to


108 Wiesel, quoted in ibid., p. 17. As Felman points out, the legal model of the trial dramatises a certain institutionalised crisis of truth in which testimony places a crucial role. The trial derives from and proceeds by a crisis of evidence, which the verdict must resolve. But the less definable crisis of truth that proceeds from contemporary trauma has brought the discourse of testimony to the fore in contemporary cultural narratives beyond the limited use in the legal context. Ibid., pp. 14–17.
contain and to account for the scale of what has happened in contemporary history. A similar problem may be discerned with mainstream accounts of the partition that categorise the widespread violence as an aberration, or as an outbreak of temporary madness. The conceptual prism of witnessing may enable a critical interrogation of such platitudes. However, an important distinction that needs to be made is as Das argues, that in the wake of the partition, unlike Felman’s description of the experience of the victims of other collective traumas, there was no ‘putting history on trial’ (as we find especially in the case of the Holocaust.

Psychoanalyst Dori Laub recognises three distinct levels of witnessing in relation to the Holocaust experience; first, the level of being the witness to oneself within the experience, second, the level of being the witness to the testimony of others and third, the level of being the witness to the process of witnessing itself. As a former camp inmate and child survivor, Laub refers to the imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust being inhabited by the impossibility of telling, leading to a situation in which silence about the truth prevails. For Laub, not telling the story serves as the perpetuation of its tyranny, especially since the longer the story remains untold the more distorted it becomes in the survivor’s conception of it. This distortion expresses itself in the loss of a sense of human relatedness. The moral gravity assigned to listening to testimony in Laub’s account as a means of restoring a sense of equilibrium to


\footnotesize{110} See Das, *Life and Words*, p. 19. A further modification made by Das of Felman’s formulations is that at times the public recounting and attempt to create a national story of a traumatic wound can itself take on the character of rumour, and in its hyperbolic form transform justice into vengeance. Ibid., p. 229.


\footnotesize{112} Ibid., p. 64.

\footnotesize{113} This leads Laub to argue that the Holocaust is a unique experience insofar as during its historical occurrence, the event produced no witnesses. Not only did the Nazis exterminate the physical witnesses of the crime, but they also sought to preclude its own witnessing even by its victims. Some attempts at bearing witness did take place, but these were doomed to fail, given that the historical imperative to bear witness could not be met during
those who have suffered violence has been pertinent in the context of projects of recovery of partition memories as well.\textsuperscript{114} There has been an emphasis on the need to break the cycle of violence, especially with respect to experiences of shame and resultant anger leading to counter violence. However, as mentioned earlier, there is the possibility that a survivor may assume that telling her/his story is meaningless, even as an act of truth-telling, without the prospect of subsequent owning up or some kind of acknowledgement on the part of either perpetrators or society.\textsuperscript{115} It is in such a context that literary witnessing acquires a certain valence, even as a mode of surrogate testimony. Even if not directly associated with legal processes of justice, the possibility of acknowledgement comes to the fore in sensitive fictional renditions. Such writings may remind us of the urgent need for transitional justice, in the absence of structures that allow closure at the societal level through the actual punishment of perpetrators. Mediated forms of testimony may also include distancing devices, establishing empathy while refraining

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the actual occurrence. The radical otherness of the event, which exceeded all familiar frames of reference and which was in many ways beyond the limits of human ability and willingness to grasp, to transmit or to imagine, led to a situation in which there was no concurrent knowing or assimilation of the history of the occurrence. It is only belatedly that the event begins to be historically grasped and seen. Thus the event created a historical gap in the collective witnessing. See Laub, ‘Truth and Testimony’, pp. 68–74. I will discuss the implications of the different kind of silencing that ensued in the wake of the partition in Chapter Five.

\textsuperscript{114} Nandy emphasises the importance of listening in interactions with partition survivors, many of whom were able to tell their story for the first time during interviews conducted by the team of researchers at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS). This study consciously chose to work with experiences of moderate violence, rather than extreme violence, which involved a level of clinical dissociation that posed problems beyond the scope of the project. Personal communication, Ashis Nandy.

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from wallowing in pain. This may be especially pertinent in situations where such unacknowledged suffering becomes the basis for a politics of retribution. Such ‘fictive’ testimony instead may allow for continued vigilance and the possibility of witnessing the witnesses.

Robert J. Lifton’s work on the Holocaust has been influential as well. In an interview with Caruth, Lifton suggests that dominant groups may exploit certain groups for the sake of coping with death anxiety, and bear false witness to events in the past. In this perverse quest for meaning, death may be imposed on others in order to reassert one’s own life as an individual and the group. As Lifton suggests, one cannot kill large numbers of people except with a claim to virtue. The act of killing here becomes a ‘morally necessary act’, perverse in the sense of having to reaffirm one’s moral system or sense of self by destroying, violating, murdering another. This constitutes a denial of death and a form of numbing. The kinds of moral righteousness that marked the slaughter of entire communities during the partition may also be interpreted as a form of false witness. As I will show in Chapter Five, the ironies of such an assumption of virtue on the part of perpetrators has generated some of the most important fiction on the subject of the partition that strives to disclose the fallibility of such assumptions. Psychological numbing through the denial of death becomes evident in some of the important stories, such as Mohan Rakesh’s ‘Malbe ka Malik’ (trans. ‘His Heap of Rubble’).

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116 In a recent essay, Alok Bhalla cites Lifton and Markusen’s argument, with respect to the genocidal mentality, that during such violence there is a complete disjunction between the hysterical self of the mob and the everyday self of the individual, a disjunction that makes the brutalisation of the other possible. See Bhalla, Partition Dialogues, p. 47.


118 Ibid., p. 140–41. Lifton argues that in the interaction between survivors and the therapist an encounter as well as a dialogue takes place. The therapist thus becomes a double witness, forming a narrative about their story involving elements of their pain, the causation of their conflicts and also the source of their knowledge, the nature of their experience. Ibid., pp. 141–42.

119 See the discussion of Manto’s ‘Shahid Saz’ (trans. ‘The Martyr Maker’) later in the introduction.
The Ethics of Remembrance

In Regarding the Pain of Others, Susan Sontag argues that all memory is individual and irreproducible. According to here what is called collective memory is not remembering but stipulating that a certain event is important and that there is a story about how it happened. Sontag is critical of the way in which memorialisation of the Holocaust has precluded the creation of memory archives regarding other kinds of atrocities, such as the enslavement of the African–American peoples. Holocaust museums may effectively disallow recognition of the evil closer home. Such selective memorialisation may also have to do with contemporary expressions of national identity and the reluctance to probe too deeply into a nation’s past. Sontag questions the idea that the creation of images that move us may be sufficient, given that sentimentality may be compatible with the taste for brutality, as in the case of the Auschwitz commandant who returned home after the day’s work to play some Schubert on the piano before dinner.

Sontag’s view is that, too much value has been assigned to memory and not enough to thinking. Remembering is an ethical act and has an ethical value of its own, given that it is the only relation we

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120 Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, New York: Picador, 2003, p. 86.
121 Novick links the transformation of the Holocaust in collective memory in America to the emergence of a ‘victim culture’, in which competitive grievances began to strive for a place in public life. This began to inflect remembrance of the Holocaust in the 1980s and 90s, with the consequent claim to uniqueness after the earlier phase in the 1940s and 50s, when the Jews had good reason to shun a victim identity. See Peter Novick, The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience, London: Bloomsbury, 1999, especially pp. 8–9. Finkelstein has sharply criticised the emergence of a ‘Holocaust industry’ playing upon perpetrator guilt to bolster claims for financial reparations. See Norman G Finkelstein, The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering, London: Verso, especially pp. 81–150.
122 Sontag, Regarding the Pain, pp. 88–94.
123 In Manto’s story ‘Shahid Saz’ (trans. ‘The Martyr Maker’) a conjunction between sentimentalism and perverse modes of witness becomes visible in the wake of partition violence.
can have with the dead through the function of mourning. However, given the fact that there is too much injustice in the world, too much remembering may be embittering. Nevertheless, she suggests it is important to experience the suffering of others, even if at a distance. Sontag’s caution regarding the ways in which memory may be appropriated has particular relevance for the present-day retrieval of the memory of the partition, especially with respect to attempts to mobilise affects such as humiliated fury and narcissistic rage, often to take revenge for earlier violence. This has led to important reflections regarding the need for ethical remembrance, especially in the context of recent projects aiming to establish archives of partition memories. Furthermore, unreflective and identitarian reconstructions of the partition have appeared in the sphere of fiction as well, as I show in the chapters to follow.

124 Sontag cites the examples of the Serbs and the Irish in this regard. See Sontag, Regarding the Pain, p. 115. The construction of memory banks in relation to partition violence by the RSS in India is another case in point. As an example, see M. C. Vajpayee and S. Paradkar, Partition Days: The Fiery Saga of the RSS, trans. S. Raje, New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan, 2002.

125 For her, photography and other forms of image making may allow for observation and elective attention that may help forestall such embittered recollection. See Sontag, Regarding the Pain, p. 117–18.

126 I am indebted to Shobhana Sonpar for this idea, with reference to her work with victims of violence in Kashmir. In another context, Menon hints at the difficulties with respect to contemporary identity politics inflecting projects of memory reconstruction in unpredictable ways. See Ritu Menon, ‘The Dynamics of Division’ in Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes and Rada Ivekovic eds. Divided Countries, Separated Cities: The Modern Legacy of Partition, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 115–30.

127 A dialogue between Sharma and Alam on this question is discussed in Chapter Four. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s essay on memories of Hindu migrants from East Bengal addresses the problems with selective remembrance of the past, and the denial of a previous history of exploitation of Muslim peasantry. See D. Chakrabarty, ‘Remembered Villages: Representations of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition’ in Mushirul Hasan ed. Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000 (rpt 2002), pp. 300–17. Pandey elaborates on Chakrabarty’s distinction between historical narratives that seek to explain the event by looking for causes, and practices of reconstructing the past (such as the memory-based narratives from Bengal) for
W. G. Sebald’s fiction is well known for its sensitive elucidation of the afterlife of the Holocaust, and is briefly discussed in Chapter Four. In an important essay, W. G. Sebald also addressed the inadequate representation of the experience of the victims of aerial bombardment in German cities like Dresden where innocent civilians died in the hundreds of thousands at a point in the war when this served no military purpose.\(^{128}\) Sebald is scathingly critical of German literature in the post-war period. Such writing, despite claiming to be a literature about ruins, did not adequately negotiate with the suffering of German civilians in the cities and lacerated memories of the event, mainly because of post-war guilt regarding atrocities perpetrated on the Jewish community. Sebald argues that the construction of aesthetic or pseudo-aesthetic effects from the ruins of an annihilated world is a process that deprives literature of its right to exist.\(^{129}\) This analysis has a bearing on the widespread tendency towards shallow nostalgia and ersatz memory in a strand of partition fiction. Such superficial memories of a way of life left behind, reconstructed in idealised and reified forms, may be a product of the desire to rewrite the past, flattening out the angularities discerned by more thoughtful writers such as Vaid.

In a separate discussion of the work of Jean Amery, Resistance fighter and survivor of Auschwitz, Sebald makes the important point that it is part of the psychic and social condition of the victim that he cannot receive compensation for what was done to him.\(^{130}\) As he suggests, history is still working through that condition and above all so is the principle of brute force behind it. Sebald quotes which the event remains inexplicable. In Pandey’s view violence is often represented as ‘out there’, perpetrated by outsiders, even in the case of historical narratives. See G. Pandey, *Memory, History and the Question of Violence*, pp. 24–27.


\(^{129}\) Ibid.

Amery ‘Twenty-two years later I am still dangling over the ground by dislocated arms.’ Amery’s essays, as Sebald points out, contain insights into the irreparable condition of those victims. From such insights we enter into the true nature of the terror visited on the victims of the ‘Final Solution’. As Amery knew, the affective equivalent of this condition, which remained unresolved despite attempts at jurisdiction and compensation, is silence. Even so, Amery sought through his work to achieve an understanding of what it meant to be marked out as a victim, excluded, persecuted and murdered.

As Sebald goes on to show, for such survivors memory can hardly be endured; the memory of not only moments of terror but also of a more or less untroubled time before. This to a great extent determines the mental state of victims of persecution. Sebald quotes the psychoanalyst William Niederland, who suggests that the victims try, usually in vain and at great expense of energy, to banish what has happened to them from their minds. Unlike the agents of terror, reliable mechanisms of repression are not at their command and though islands of amnesia do develop in them, they are often not able to genuinely forget. Rather, the diffuse ability to forget goes hand-in-hand with the recurrent resurgence of images that cannot be banished from memory, that remain effective as agencies of an almost pathological hypermnesia in a past otherwise emptied of content. For the victims, the experience of terror dislocated time itself, ‘that most abstract of all humanity’s homes’ and the only fixed points are traumatic scenes recurring with a painful clarity of memory and vision. The search for a time that cannot be forgotten entails a quest for a form of language in which experiences that paralyse the power of articulation can be expressed. In Amery’s case the open form of the essay allowed him to reconstruct his memory to the point when it became accessible to him and to us.

There are few comparable examples in Partition writings of victims of extreme forms of violence themselves generating such compelling reflections on traumatic experience in the form of essays

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131 Amery, quoted in Sebald, ‘Against the Irreversible’, p. 147.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid., p. 147–49.
134 Ibid., p. 149.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., pp. 150–51.
or fiction. Even so, flashbacks and intrusions of traumatic images may have been an inevitable corollary of existence of survivors of extreme violence during the partition, reverberating into the experience of communities in which perpetrators often continued to live in proximity with former victims. It is also possible that in many such cases the transition from victim to perpetrator with the shift from one region to another may have complicated the possibility of recuperation. Bhisham Sahni’s story ‘Amritsar Aa Gaya He’ (trans. ‘We Have Arrived at Amritsar’) captures this ambivalence of identity-in-transition for one such individual, moving from a situation in which he perceives himself as being humiliated to a new area where he would now be part of a majority community. In such a context, bearing witness becomes further fraught with uncertainty, reminding us of Primo Levi’s conception of the ‘grey zone’ and the difficulty of testifying to situations where the victim could so easily be transformed into the victimiser.¹³⁷

The Limits to ‘Fictive’ Testimony

Fictional representations of the historical experience and memory as well as the afterlife of the partition acquire salience in the light of the above-mentioned analytical frameworks and insights.¹³⁸ Due to the long absence/suppression of an archive of first generation survivor testimony, family memory in South Asia became

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¹³⁷ See Levi, The Drowned, pp. 22–64; Giorgio Agamben, Remnants of Auschwitz, pp. 34–41. However, such recognition of ambiguity need not lead to cultural relativism or an obliteration of distinctions between victim and perpetrator. A discussion with Hillel Levine helped clarify this point.

¹³⁸ Kabir’s reading of Book One of Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children is an example of critical engagement with a major text that draws on the resources of Holocaust studies to argue that such partition narratives present an alternative, albeit contested, site for mourning, in the absence of public rituals and spaces of mourning sanctioned by the nation–state. Kabir foregrounds her subject position as an Indian Muslim in her argument. According to her, the fragmentary quality of Rushdie’s narrative and the frequent references to forgetting and amnesia in this ‘light hearted’ retelling of the partition violence become indicators of the fracturing of the capacity for narrative representation. See Kabir, ‘Subjectivities, Memories’, pp. 245–64.
the primary vehicle for the inscription and transmission of memory, as mentioned earlier. I will argue that this submerged archive is often reconstituted and reinterpreted through literary modes of remembrance. However, significant Partition writings often self-consciously indicate an awareness of the limits to such ‘fictive’ testimony. A range of strategies of representation, including allegory, symbolisation and the use of irony and black humour can be discerned in such writing. Indeed, writing that seeks to programmatically intervene in ideological terms through explicit messages often consolidates a fixation on the traumatic event, feeding into the stereotypes of communal and sectarian discourses even as it seeks to challenge them, thus disallowing the work of mourning that complex modes of narrative might otherwise perform.

The predominance of symbolisation and oblique renderings of traumatic memory, as in the passages through dreams or mythological constructs in the work of Intizar Husain, highlights the difficulties of rendering a counter memory. Such fictional representations may serve as an antidote to official narratives about the past, as well as to ersatz or artificially constructed memory. Indeed, artificial memories are actively being produced by the Hindu Right as part of an ideological mission to rewrite the history of the partition, even while constructing Hindu victims as heroic martyrs. This agenda of reinforcing through reinscription the effects of the violence that occurred earlier may actually set the stage for future violence. In this context the role of literature as a mode of surrogate testimony, folding back into historical memory after such a detour through the imagination, becomes even more significant. Writers of fiction in turn draw upon other forms

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139 Kavita Panjabi’s account of the vicissitudes of such transmission of memory in Sindhi families displaced during the partition is pertinent; she explicitly acknowledges the difficulty of probing traumatic memories in a conversation with her parents about their experience in refugee camps. See Panjabi, _Old Maps and New_, pp. 14–16.

140 Das and Nandy argue that certain writings reduce the partition experience to the language of a feud, with violence on one side matched by that on the other. See Veena Das and Ashis Nandy, ‘Violence, Victimhood and the Language of Silence’ in Veena Das ed. _The Word and the World: Fantasy, Symbol and Record_, New Delhi: Sage, p. 189.

141 See Vajpayee and Paradkar, _Partition Days_.

of public testimony such as memoirs and personal accounts, sometimes with problematic results, as I will argue in Chapter Four in relation to forms of ‘documentary’ fiction.

Partition historiography has responded to debates in the sphere of oral history and historiography of the Holocaust.\(^\text{142}\) The difficulty of articulating traumatic memory and the quest for a form in which remembrance might take shape remain valid concerns for social scientists and literary critics. Indeed, the paradigms of analysis emanating from the Holocaust need to be appropriately modified to adequately come to terms with the collective trauma following the partition and its continuing effects on South Asian culture and society, as we have seen earlier. As social scientists such as Sharma and Alam have pointed out, important distinctions need to be made while making comparisons. The Nazi state was primarily implicated in perpetrating genocide, unlike during the reciprocal violence during the partition, even though large organisations in society may have been involved during the partition violence as well.\(^\text{143}\) The qualitatively disparate nature of repression and violence during these two different events needs to be underlined.\(^\text{144}\) Furthermore, in the case of the Holocaust, the Nuremberg trials may have led to a (partial) moral resolution in the public domain, in contrast to the situation with respect to perpetrators of violence during the partition.


\(^{143}\) Prior to the Holocaust, Vogler reminds us that the first instance of genocide took place during the German colonial occupation of Southwest Africa in 1904, where the Herero tribe was eliminated. See Thomas A. Vogler, ‘Poetic Witness: Writing the Real’ in Anna Douglas and Thomas A. Vogler eds. *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma*, New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 204–5.

However, according to Agamben, the completion of the Nuremberg trials helped propagate the false idea that the problem of Auschwitz had been overcome.\(^{145}\) As Agamben argues, this problem was so enormous that it called into question the law itself. In his view, the confusion of law and morality and the contamination of the concept of responsibility by law have had adverse effects. According to him, Primo Levi identified a new ethical element at Auschwitz, the ‘grey zone’. In the grey zone, the oppressed becomes the oppressor and the executioner appears as the victim, a grey alchemy in which good and evil find their point of fusion. Indeed, Auschwitz ushered in an infamous zone of irresponsibility in which Arendt’s conception of the unimaginable banality of evil found expression.\(^{146}\) To a lesser extent, the emergence of such ‘zones of irresponsibility’ may be noted in the case of reciprocal forms of partition violence in which the two newly formed nation–states became complicit as well.\(^{147}\) The Nazis sought to brutally erase the memories of the experience of the inhabitants of the concentration camps. Holocaust survivors were often unable or reluctant to speak about what they had been through, even in communities to which they once belonged; this situation took a generation to abate.\(^{148}\) Subsequently, it became possible for a public language to be created through which trauma could be acknowledged and experiences of loss articulated.\(^{149}\) While this led to the possibility of working through such memories and collective mourning, delayed trauma


\(^{146}\) Ibid.


\(^{149}\) A discussion with Hillel Levine helped clarify this point.
manifested itself in the tragic suicides of many survivors, including writers such as Primo Levi, Paul Celan, Tadeusz Borowski and Jean Amery, in some cases, years after the event.

As mentioned earlier, the accounts of partition victims were by and large stigmatised at first, as they were deemed to bring bad luck. Their silence and inability to give public testimony may be contrasted to the anonymous, often triumphalist, stories about atrocities that began circulating in the immediate aftermath of 1947. As Das shows, this excess of speech in the form of rumour existed not only in popular discourse, but also at the heart of the discourse of the state during the debates in the Constituent Assembly. Furthermore, the historical trauma experienced by a generation that had also participated in the freedom struggle premised on the concept of non-violence was of a different order to that experienced by Jewish communities in the different countries of Europe during the attempted execution of the ‘Final Solution’. The fact that numbers of Hindus and Muslims killed in different parts of the country roughly balanced out led to a situation in which a certain degree of amnesia seemed to be accepted as a necessary corollary by the leaders of both the nation–states.

However, it is also important to keep in mind that many who looked back to the partition were not direct victims. Kaur’s study, based on interviews with refugees in Delhi, highlights crucial differences in terms of social class between migrants from varied

150 See Das, Life and Words, pp. 36–37.
151 For a recent account of the ‘Final Solution’ focusing on the experience at Auschwitz, including testimony from both survivors and perpetrators, see Laurence Rees, Auschwitz: The Nazis and the ‘Final Solution’, London: BBC Books, 2005, pp. 360–75.
152 Also see Ashis Nandy, ‘The Days of the Hyaena: A Foreword’ in Sengupta ed. Mapmaking. Muslims were of course in a minority in the subcontinent and thus proportionally more Muslims were killed. As Hasan shows, there were 1.3 million Hindus and 1.6 million Sikhs in the provinces and states that were included in Pakistan, and around 42 million Muslims in the provinces and states that acceded to India. Prior to August 15, 1947, some 5 lakh Hindus and Sikhs crossed the border, followed by between 7–8 lakhs from August 15 to early September. The Military Evacuation Organisation evacuated 28 lakh refugees from Pakistan to India and 29.5 lakh Muslims from India to Pakistan up to the end of January 1948. See Hasan, From Pluralism to Separatism, footnote 1.
backgrounds from West Punjab; class location mediated the trauma of dislocation. The varied modes of transport used during migration bears out Kaur’s argument well. The well-to-do migrants travelled by air, others travelled by rail; army trucks transported some migrants, while vast numbers joined the kafilas or caravans on foot or bullock cart by road. Furthermore, the experience of Muslim ‘optees’ (an official designation for government servants who exercised the option to migrate), was qualitatively different from that of the many Muslim victims directly affected by rioting and arson and driven from their homes, especially in East Punjab during 1947. Some who migrated to Pakistan out of choice rather than being forced to do so, may have later regretted the decision (Qurratulain Hyder and Josh Malihabadi did subsequently return to India, for example). But most migrants from divided families continued to be afflicted by governmental restrictions on travel and mobility, especially after the Pakistani state put a stop to further migration from India. Similarly, there were many Hindus, especially in Sindh, who decided to migrate later on account of a perceived fear of persecution. This experience was different from that of the Hindus of West Punjab, who were subjected to ethnic cleansing.

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154 The popular memory of the migration is, of course, that of the arduous journeys by train or road. See Kaur, *Since 1947*, pp. 65–83.
156 I refer briefly to Hyder’s novel *Aag ka Darya*, written in 1959 and ‘transcreated’ by the author into English as *River of Fire* in 1998 in Chapter Three. The treatment of partition violence is fleeting in *River of Fire*, even as the novel develops a metaphorical account of the plural culture of the subcontinent over the centuries and its subsequent breakdown. Also see Josh Malihabadi’s personal account ‘My Ordeal as a Citizen of Pakistan’, pp. 196–206.
158 Sarah Ansari provides an account of the experience in Sindh, especially Karachi, where violence began only with the trickling in of migrants who themselves were victims. See S. Ansari, ‘Partition, Migration and Refugees: Responses to the Arrival of Muhajirs in Sind During 1947–48’, in D. A.
Moreover, the nature of remembrance amongst many Mohajirs in Pakistan was marked by a sense of being at odds with the Punjabi dominated society in which they found themselves.\(^{159}\) This often caused them to reconstruct the world of memories left behind in an attempt to preserve that cultural memory in the new space in which they now lived. The tensions of such attempts to evade the homogenising effects of national culture were registered in such displaced communities, often marked by wistfulness and nostalgia, sometimes guilt and bitterness and delayed manifestations of trauma.\(^{160}\) A diverse tapestry of experiences of migration becomes visible in the fiction that maps the imaginative cartography generated by the experience of displacement.\(^{161}\)


\(^{159}\) Krishna Sobti narrates an incident in which migrants to Pakistan were referred to as ‘Hindustani Muslims’, since the belief was that the only ‘real’ Muslims were Punjabi Musalmans. See Bhalla, ‘Memory and History: A Conversation with Krishna Sobti’, *Hindi: Language, Discourse, Writing* 1, 3–4 (Oct 2000–March 2001): 93. This exchange has also appeared in Bhalla, *Partition Dialogues*, pp. 135–64. However, as Samad points out, the term mohajir was applied to Urdu and Gujarati speaking migrants; in the imagining of mohajir ethnicity, the Punjabi migrants were excluded. In his terms, the mohajirs provide an example of ethnic assertion not only based on commonality of culture, as in classic anthropological accounts of ethnicity. See Yunus Samad, ‘Pakistan: From Minority Rights to Majoritarianism’ in Gyanendra Pandey and Yunus Samad, *Fault Lines of Nationhood*, New Delhi: Roli Books, pp. 118–23, especially p. 121.

\(^{160}\) Nandy cites the case of Nighat Said Khan, who speaks of descendants of Urdu-speaking Muslims in Pakistan having internalised an ongoing if silent pain, not only never having exorcised the horrors of partition, but also the trauma of being a part of a truncated identity. Cited in Nandy, ‘The Invisible Holocaust’, p. 115.

\(^{161}\) A discussion with Aamir Mufti helped clarify this point. Darko Suvin cites Edward Said’s definition ‘Anyone prevented from returning home is an exile’ in his perceptive typology of displacement. See Suvin, ‘Displaced Persons’, *New Left Review* 31: 109. Suvin follows Said’s distinction between refugees and émigrés, while underscoring the political reasons that may force a people out of their original society in the case of exiles. While expatriates may choose to leave their country for ideological/economic
effects appeared in the form of post-memory, afflicting even those not directly impacted by the event. In contrast, for many Indian Muslims who had been subjected to forms of near-genocidal violence the trauma of the partition was manifested in the form of shrinkage of syncretic space. As Shail Mayaram has shown in the case of the Meo community, the sense of being able to effortlessly move between ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ identities was lost in the wake of partition violence in Alwar and Bharatpur states.

Such differentiated effects of traumatic violence during the partition become evident when we turn to literary narratives. The juxtaposition of writing about the partition from Pakistan with writing from India allows for a critical comparison of nationalist chauvinisms on either side of the border. This distinction is harder to make in the case of the earlier writings, which stemmed from similar sets of perceptions and experiences, even if the ideological reasons, they have the option of return, unlike exiles (who depart on an individual basis) and refugees (who are forced out en masse). For Suvin, émigrés who migrate for economic reasons only rarely have the choice to return. See Suvin, ‘Displaced Persons’, pp. 109–12. In the case of the partition, we may note the predominance of exiles and refugees, with some later instances of émigrés and expatriates choosing to move to the West.


Subsequently, efforts to reinvent this sense of a dual or syncretic identity were made, often subject to pressures exerted by more contemporary forms of communal mobilisation, as scholars like Shail Mayaram point out. See Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes*, pp.162–220.

For a discussion of the necessity of historical differentiation of trauma, particularly with respect to the distinction between trauma suffered by victims and perpetrators, see LaCapra, *Writing History*, pp. 78–80.
moorings of the nation–states were opposed to one another. Later writings illustrate the difficulty of resisting the workings of the machinery of ideology constructed by postcolonial nation–states and its impact on collective memory, particularly with reference to the construction of memory of 1947.

As Talbot points out, the collective memory of the partition has been refracted through communal and state ideologies. In India, the partition is associated with state secularism and the dangers of rampant communalism, even as violence is explained as the result of the Pakistan movement, demonised as the ‘other’ of Indian secular nationalism. In early nationalist historiography in India, a dual perception of the event, viewed on the one hand with a sense of triumph in terms of the successful culmination of the freedom struggle and on the other with regret, due to the breaking up of the ‘motherland’ can be discerned. Recently, the Hindutva movement selectively replayed bitter memories of the partition to fix the stereotype of the Muslim as ‘aggressor’. In Pakistan, on the other hand, the belief that the Indian Muslim identity was defined by religion rather than by language, which gave rise to the two-nation theory, has been perpetuated. Official histories of Pakistan often treat the moment as one of necessary sacrifices made in order to establish the Islamic nation–state. In certain cases the writing on the partition from different sides of the border mimics such ideo-logical positions. However, significant writing interrogates such assumptions, sometimes through an ironic criticism of stereotypes and the undoing of a sense of ‘us and them’, as well as an acknowledge-ment of difference and alterity. Indeed, writing from Pakistan often hints at a submerged sense of loss that may not always have been manifested in public life.

This study seeks to locate the coordinates of individual and community

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165 See Talbot in Talbot and Tatla eds. Epicentre of Violence, p. 2. For a contrasting analysis of Indian and Pakistani nationalisms, see Pandey and Samad, Fault Lines of Nationhood.

166 Ibid.

167 However, as Talbot also shows, the mohajir sense of aggrieved nationalism emphasises the death of ‘two million’ mohajirs in the achievement of Pakistan. See Talbot in Talbot and Tatla eds. Epicentre of Violence, p. 2.
memory that underpin such fictional reconstructions of the event. Contemporary ideo-logical pressures that these texts are inflected by and also seek to resist are discussed here with reference to recent historical work, with its focus on studies of region and locality and textures elided in earlier accounts.

In the wake of collective violence, few of the perpetrators were brought to book, with damaging implications for the unfolding of the trajectory of democracy and prospects for social justice in the newly formed nation-states of India and Pakistan. Indeed, a key hypothesis of this study is that the attempt to aspire to a form of proxy witnessing may be discerned as an ethical imperative in the best of the writing on the partition. Such fictional modes of truth telling seek to speak on behalf of those who had experienced such violence, since the dead cannot bear witness and the victims of traumatic violence themselves often choose to remain silent, either on account of their experience of shame and humiliation or for fear of repetition of violence.

The study thus maps shifts in the contours of literary remembrance and historical trauma in the domain of novelistic representation across three generations. The grouping of novels in terms of the period in which they appeared is intended to give a diachronic sense of shifts in individual perception as well as collective memory. Thus in Chapter Two, selected novels written in the 1940s and 50s are critically analysed, followed by novels of the 1950s and 60s in Chapter Three, and novels that appeared since 1980 in Chapter Four. The short stories, on the other hand, are

168 In such a context, even sharing their experiences could often be considered a futile gesture by many of the survivors, for whom this brought back ‘bad’ memories. Such scepticism came to the fore in the context of the South African experience with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, given that punitive justice did not follow, as some victims expected. However, the Commission did at least give the victims’ families a chance to know the truth as regards what happened to their loved ones during the apartheid regime. See the section on victims’ stories in the volume edited by Posel and Simpson, Commissioning the Past, pp. 97–146.

grouped in clusters in Chapter Five.\textsuperscript{170} Resistance to ideological pressures exerted by the two nation–states and recrudescent sectarian/communal formations could be achieved in the major novels and short stories through varied representational techniques, as we shall see. While certain instances of witnessing in literary form enabled the restoration of affect with respect to experiences consigned to the realm of the inarticulate, critical witnessing included a further element of self-reflexivity, allowing for the possibility of self-critique.\textsuperscript{171} Furthermore, the limits to literary witnessing and self-understanding become apparent in important writings that problematised the very act of bearing witness.

As an instance let us turn to a short story by Sa’adat Hasan Manto, ‘Shahid Saz’ (trans. ‘The Martyr Maker’). In this story Manto interrogates conventional assumptions about ethical principles and legality through the occasionally whimsical tone he adopts, emphasising the gap between events taking place and the

\textsuperscript{170} In Zaman’s terms the genre allows for a kind of heightened intensity impossible to sustain in the novel form. See Niaz Zaman, \textit{A Divided Legacy: The Partition in Selected Novels of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh}, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 21. Placing the stories in chronological order is not the major consideration here, given the difficulty of locating exact dates of first publication.

\textsuperscript{171} Here I follow scholars such as Harriet Davidson, who argues for the transformative power of the poetry of witnessing and testimony. As she suggests, the witness speaks from urgency in a situation that demands a voice, which may also include an encounter with strangeness. Though the witness may be to one’s own experience, the experience created in the witness is non-identical to the self. Secondly, witnessing is crucially about a speaker and the hearer and must create an addressee when it does not have one. Both speaker and hearer become witnesses: such testimony allows for an orientation towards the future. Davidson in turn draws on Felman’s idea of witnessing as being most thoroughly carried out in art. See Harriet Davidson, ‘Poetry, Witness, Feminism’ in Anna Douglas and Thomas A. Vogler eds. \textit{Witness and Memory}, pp.164–66. Some of Satish Gujral’s paintings of this period, such as ‘Mourning En-Masse’ (1947–48), exemplify this mode of artistic witnessing. See Gujral, \textit{Satish Gujral: Selected Works 1947–2000}, New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 2000, p.15. A well-known Punjabi poem by Amrita Pritam ‘I Say unto Waris Shah’ (trans. N. S. Tasneem from ‘Aj Akhan Waris Shah Nun’) summons the spirit of Waris Shah, the author of the \textit{qissa Heer-Ranjha} to bear witness to the suffering of women during the partition. See Pritam, ‘I Say unto Waris Shah’ in Mushirul Hasan ed. \textit{India Partitioned}, pp. 287–89.
way these are represented in historical memory. The story is set in the aftermath of partition violence, even as many were forced to migrate across the border. The narrator is ‘a baniya by caste’, a former dealer in cocaine from Kathiawar in Gujarat, who finds lucrative opportunities opening up for him in the newly formed state of Pakistan.\(^{172}\) He becomes wealthy after taking possession of land left behind by Hindu and Sikh migrants and having them reallocated for a suitable fee. Nevertheless, the man from Gujarat is not quite able to find satisfaction and peace of mind. He begins to believe that this is on account of not having performed any good deeds while in Pakistan. The narrator is transformed from racketeer to witness, or so it seems, as he observes the extent of human deprivation and misery around him and listens to stories of woe recounted by others. He thinks of various ways of helping others, including charity work, setting up a hospital and even building a mosque. However, he decides against these various options, ironically citing the dangers of creating further sectarian tensions in the case of building new mosques. Eventually, he decides to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca; on that very day he reads a news item that gives him the clue as regards the course of action to pursue.\(^{173}\) The ironic conflation of his intention to go for pilgrimage and discovery of a bizarre route to personal salvation through a news report provides a sense of the role mediatised forms of religiosity played in contributing to the collective descent into anomie at this time.

During a public rally in the city a stampede occurs and thirty people are trampled to death. They are described in the papers next day not as victims but as ‘martyrs’. The man from Gujarat decides to help as many people as possible become martyrs, thus lending meaning to their drab existence. This endeavour takes on an absurd logic of its own as he initially tries to help individuals in the final stage of life realise that it would be appropriate for them to accept their destiny and become martyrs, during a time in which even Hindus and Sikhs aspired to become martyrs. He is surprised to find that people cling on to life even to the last, as in the case of an old woman whom he places on the railway tracks, but who runs away when she hears the train coming.


\(^{173}\) Ibid., pp. 18–19.
The man from Gujarat is, nevertheless, able to find a solution for his difficulty. He buys a dilapidated structure dating back to Mughal times and charges rent from poor and destitute people. As per his assessment, the building collapses during the rainy season and many people are killed. He is delighted to find that he is able to combine his prior interest in property and land dealings with his new preoccupation with helping people become ‘martyrs’. At the end of the story this becomes a thriving business as he constructs new buildings with substandard materials in the knowledge that they will collapse before long, killing all those living inside. He reflects that those who might survive must be regarded as sinners, those whom God is not yet willing to accept in the capacity of ‘martyrs’. He continues to endow the life of his victims with meaning, as abiding witness to their ‘martyrdom’.174 In this anomic enterprise, significantly enough, results from his investment in a mediatised, virtual conception of the religious.175 The gap between image and substance generates black humour in this story, even as we perceive the irony of the protagonist’s appropriation of the Islamic discourse of martyrdom in the service of private gain, inspired initially by his reading of a news report. For the concept of shahadat, or martyrdom, was often linked in Islamic teachings to the notion of bearing witness (shahid).176 Here, instead, a mediatised version of martyrdom as spectacle undermines the possibility of bearing witness.

Manto thus scathingly satirises the rank opportunism and racketeering that hindered rehabilitation efforts in the newly formed state of Pakistan and those who literally made a killing on account of the conditions then prevalent. The perverse rationality embodied in the self-description of the schemes and strategems

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174 Ibid., pp. 20–22.
175 A discussion with Deepak Mehta helped clarify this point.
176 A conversation with Mahmood Farooqui helped clarify this idea. Derrida demonstrates the connection between bearing witness and martyrdom in the Western tradition in his reading of Blanchot’s story ‘The Instant of my Death’. As he shows in his discussion of the indistinction that may arise between testimony and literature in its passionate trajectories, ‘passion’ (in the Christian-Roman sense) always implies martyrdom, and thus testimony. See Blanchot and Derrida, The Instant of my Death and Demeure, pp. 27–28. In the story discussed above, in the absence of true passion, bad passions rule.
launched in order to batten on the misery of the most deprived and desperate sections of society is laid bare through the self-revelations of the witness figure, who speaks from within the structures of state patronage. And yet there is no explicit judgment of the man who carries out these schemes with an occasional wink and nod to the reader. It is perhaps through this absence of judgment that certain kinds of interpretative possibilities emerge which allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the psychology of racketeers, bureaucrats in cahoots with them and a section of the mohajirs or migrants who became used to hand-outs while living in relief camps.

The impact of partition violence, Manto seems to suggest, is such that familiar idioms and registers as well as well-worn moral axioms and concepts such as martyrdom may not remain unscathed. In an era in which the discourse of moral goodness and ethical propriety had come to rest on shaky foundations, given its invocation in the name of reform by individuals and community leaders for narrow sectarian ends, the lacunae in the testimony of such an unreliable witness requires us to make more careful judgment of the outcome of nationalist idealism and fervour, especially the belief in ‘martyrs to the cause’, as seen earlier. The racketeer–witness is a familiar type, recognisable as a representative of the self-centred middle-classes, making his way even in the aftermath of catastrophic violence. The story articulates an allegorical criticism of the failures of both government and civil society to reckon with the fall-out of partition displacement, as well as the lack of checks and balances during the implementation of rehabilitation measures, leading to the emergence of such an opportunist class. The ironic play of perspectives between the narrator’s invocation of discourses of self-reform and nationalist idealism and the partial registering of the magnitude of distress in the public domain is predicated on an awareness of the chasm between stated goals and achieved results that opened up after the partition. In this story there is thus an ironic sense of the fallibility of the project of witnessing.\(^{177}\)

New directions continue to emerge for partition literature, as a mode of post-memorial fiction. While Manto and Intizar Husain initiated the mode of reflexive ‘fictive’ testimony in the context of partition violence, I will argue in conclusion that Pakistani poet Fahmida Riaz has created a distinctive new form while negotiating with continuing political violence across South Asia. Her writings draw upon the resources of genres such as the memoir, travelogue and the short story while engaging with the fallout of political violence whose roots can be traced back to the catastrophe of 1947. Fahmida Riaz’s *Zinda Bahar Lane* (1990, trans. 2000) and *Karachi* (1996 trans. *Reflections in a Cracked Mirror*, 2001) reflect on the predicament of communities such as the Urdu-speaking migrants (the ‘stranded Pakistanis’) living in ghettos in Bangladesh and mohajirs as well as Sindhis in Karachi who still suffer from the consequences of arbitrary divisions on the basis of religion and identity initiated in 1947.\(^{178}\) Even as this reinvented mode of ‘fictive’ testimony came to the fore, we may note the perils of uncritically conflating the effects of different experiences of loss and trauma in Kamila Shamsie’s recent novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009), as well as the problems with metaphoric overextension in Kamleshwar’s *Kitne Pakistan* (2001, trans. *Partitions*, 2005). Such texts indicate both the strengths and limitations of narratives that continue to appear, striving to bear witness to the legacy of partition’s afterlife sixty years after the event. This study joins with critical discourse that may facilitate the emergence of a public language that can both encompass the effects of historical trauma as well as own up to historical wrongs.

\(^{178}\) Papiya Ghosh’s important work on this community in internal exile will be alluded to in greater detail later. See Papiya Ghosh, *Partition and the South Asian Diaspora*, pp. 57–90.
Chapter 2

Negotiating the Effects of Historical Trauma: Novels of the 1940s and 50s

Short story writers such as Manto and Intizar Husain generated remarkable self-reflexive modes of ‘fictive’ testimony in the immediate aftermath of widespread and multiple forms of violence, as we shall see in Chapter Five. On the other hand, not many major novels about the partition appeared before 1960 in Hindi, Urdu and English. The few novels that depict the experience of the partition seem preoccupied with obvious manifestations of communal violence or seek to restore the human dimension to the story of independence and division of the subcontinent, at times in overtly didactic ways. Some of these narratives fall back on communal stereotypes and conventional ways of coming to terms with the unprecedented fracturing of intercommunity relations. Such early novels are often marked by sheer bewilderment or a sense of underlying guilt, given their proximity to the event. There is also a seeming inability to find a

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mode of narrativisation that would enable writing to step out of the shadow of colonial and nationalist frameworks of reference while depicting communal violence.\(^2\)

The effects of psychological numbing, a consequent sense of frozen time, as well as the constraints imposed by nationalist myth making played their part in these writings as well. As Das argues, the violence in the interior realm as many fled to an alien space led to a new logic of division; the self became radically fugitive and the world radically fragmented.\(^3\) During this period embodied forms of witnessing existed, nonetheless, even as a veritable contract of silence was imposed.\(^4\) Many survivors had also to contend with an absence at the societal level of a capacity for listening, amounting to a taboo on divulging such experiences. Gandhi’s fasts and espousal of non-violence became the exemplary form of embodied witnessing in collective memory as a way of moving beyond the ‘time of partition’.\(^5\) The cessation of violence after his assassination can be attributed to collective recognition of the significance of his ultimate self-sacrifice.\(^6\)

The concept of historical trauma is invoked in my discussion of early fictional reconstructions of historical processes leading up to the partition. Dominick LaCapra argues that historical trauma is specific, afflicting victims of cataclysmic events, as in the case of the Holocaust.\(^7\) Furthermore, he points out that there is a differentiated specificity to instances of historical trauma, for not everyone is

\(^2\) For a discussion of colonial and nationalist writing about riots, see Mehta, ‘Documents and Testimony’, pp. 259–98. The argument in this essay is elucidated later in the chapter.


\(^4\) Ibid., p. 77.


\(^6\) Erikson’s earlier cited discussion of Gandhi’s capacity for creative re-enactment, despite a sense of being cursed, is pertinent in this regard. See Erikson, *Gandhi’s Truth*, pp. 132–33.

\(^7\) LaCapra, *Writing History*, pp. 76–82 .
subject to it or entitled to the subject-position associated with it. In the representation of historical trauma the distinction between victims, perpetrators and bystanders as well as collaborators and resisters is crucial. Instances of secondary trauma or perpetrator trauma cannot be equated with that of the victim, even though ambiguous cases belonging to Primo Levi’s ‘grey zone’ may exist. This is because the tendency to collapse all survivors into the category of traumatised victims may lead to distortions of the historical record and an inability to deal with the nuances of trauma’s afterlife. This argument needs to be further qualified with respect to the experience in the Subcontinent during the violence and its aftermath, when many victims became perpetrators, often after shedding their minority status, having moved from one region to another. Indeed, the trauma afflicting some survivors of the partition arose out of experiences as both victim and perpetrator. I will argue that novelists writing soon after 1947 were unable to devise an adequate mode of testimony in fictional form, partly as a result of this ambiguity and the pervasiveness of the ‘grey zone’ across South Asia. Indeed, in both India and Pakistan there was a prolonged societal refusal to recognise the existence of perpetrators at all, and a marked inability to initiate processes of reconciliation with the ‘other’, though to different degrees in the two countries.

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8 LaCapra convincingly argues the case for an attentive mode of secondary witnessing, in which an empathic unsettlement results from a virtual experience in which one places oneself in the place of the victim, always recognising the difference between oneself and the victim. Furthermore, openness to such empathic unsettlement as opposed to reassuring stories of moral upliftment adds a desirable affective dimension to attempts to understand historical events and their representations. See LaCapra, Writing History, pp. 78–79.

9 There were numerous cases of people risking their lives to help neighbours from the ‘other’ community in danger, as Nandy emphasises. See Nandy, ‘The Invisible Holocaust’, p. 122. It is also true that some victims later became active perpetrators, whether in the name of safeguarding ‘honour’, or revenge, often re-enacting in turn the traumatic experiences they themselves had been subjected to. See for instance Jalal, Self and Sovereignty, especially pp. 386–562.

10 A discussion with Alok Rai helped clarify this point. Verma’s case studies based on interviews, including perpetrators, are pertinent in this context, especially her interview with Chowdhary Mangat Ram. See Verma, Aftermath, pp. 3–27.
Some of the early novels, instead, seek to generate uplifting messages or optimistic scenarios in the form of redemption narratives, in which suffering is shown to have a higher purpose.\footnote{LaCapra develops a similar argument with reference to narratives about the Holocaust, such as Spielberg’s film Schindler’s List. See LaCapra, Writing History, p. 78.}

I will first contrast two narratives of the 1940s, written from the vantage point of the Muslim minority community, Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) and Mumtaz Shah Nawaz’s *The Heart Divided* (a novel written in 1948 though published in 1957), that in some respects prefigure the catastrophic loss to come. Ali’s introspective novel is characterised by a degree of critical nostalgia for a way of life perceived to be disintegrating, while Shah Nawaz’s autobiographical and documentary style interweaves personal and political prehistory with 1947. After a brief discussion of Khadija Mastur’s novel *Aangan* (1952 trans. Inner Courtyard 2000), a social realist treatment of post-partition refugee experience in the Progressive mode, I will counterpoint *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khushwant Singh (perhaps the most popular novel about the Partition) with *The Dark Dancer* (1958) by Balachandra Rajan, a less well-known novelistic attempt to allegorise partition experience from a returned South Indian expatriate’s perspective.

### Twilight States of Being

After the 1857 rebellion, the *ashraf* or upper class Muslims of North India faced a situation of decline in terms of both political power and cultural hegemony. According to the ironic reflections of the Persian and Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib, ‘I have none of the hallmarks of a Muslim; why is it that every humiliation the Muslim suffers pains and grieves me so much?’\footnote{Quoted in Jalal, Self and Sovereignty, p. 1.} Ahmed Ali’s novel *Twilight in Delhi* was written in the late 1930s and published in 1940.\footnote{Ahmed Ali was born in Delhi in 1908 and studied at Aligarh Muslim University and Lucknow University. He later taught English literature in India, China, Pakistan and the USA. Along with Sajjad Zaheer, Mahmuduzzafar and Rashid Jahan he brought out the path-breaking collection of stories and a play titled *Angaarey* in 1932, which was banned by the then Government of India. Ali played an important role in the development of Indian literature and was a key figure in the emergence of modern Urdu literature.}

The continuing after-effects of the revolt of 1857 and its bloody aftermath,
after which Mughal rule in India was decisively ended and the formerly dominant Muslim aristocracy reduced in stature, are alluded to in this novel set in the second decade of the twentieth century, at the time of the imperial durbar and coronation ceremonies of King George V in 1911. Gyanendra Pandey suggests that *Twilight in Delhi* laments the fate of the city of Delhi as it comes under the sway of a corrosive, corrupting, commercialised and aggressive colonial culture. Indeed, the novel is a detailed description of the life, world and social practices prevalent in the 1920s amongst ashraf Muslims of old Delhi who had experienced the transition to a colonial system of governance. It also achieves a poignant evocation of a state of internal exile.

role in the efforts leading to the formation of the All India Progressive Writers Association (1936). Ahmed Ali gradually drifted away from the Association, because he refused to accept the view that ‘only proletarian literature or literature dealing with the proletariat and/or peasantry could be considered progressive’ (Ali cited in Muneeza Shamsie ed. *A Dragonfly in the Sun: An Anthology of Pakistani Writing in English*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 8). After the partition he settled in Karachi, where he achieved further recognition as a poet and translator. See biographical note in M. Shamsie ed. *Dragonfly*, pp. 8–9. The novel was published with critical approval from E. M. Forster in England in 1940. Most copies of the first edition were lost, though, in a bombing raid in the war on a warehouse, leading to the novel being forgotten for many years. See William Dalrymple, *City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi*, New Delhi: Flamingo, 1993, (rpt 1994), pp. 58–59.

Cohn describes in detail the Imperial Assemblage of 1877 held after the Royal Titles Act of 1876, where Queen Victoria was declared Kaiser-I-Hind and Empress of India. This event, which ushered in a new idiom of colonial authority, recurred twice, in 1903 when Lord Curzon organised an imperial durbar in Delhi to proclaim Edward VII emperor of India, and in 1911. See Bernard S. Cohn, ‘Representing Authority in Victorian India’ in Saurabh Dube ed. *Postcolonial Passages: Contemporary History-writing on India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004 (rpt 2005), pp. 47–69.


In the novel Ahmed Ali captures nuances of interpersonal life in a community that had evolved sophisticated forms of culture and modes of coexistence over a period of centuries. However, the advent of British rule brought about transformations that are recorded in the novel, with specific reference to the 1857 rebellion.\textsuperscript{17} The memory of 1857 pervades the present, while collective defeat is symbolised by the plight of the descendants of the king, Bahadur Shah Zafar. Mir Nihal, the protagonist, a well-to-do Muslim householder, recalls this event two days before the coronation ceremonies of the English king are to begin. His wife Begum Nihal relates how ruthlessly Delhi had been looted by the ‘Farangis’ at the time of the revolt and how the Muslims had been turned out of the city and their possessions and properties taken away.\textsuperscript{18} ‘All this, and more had not been forgotten by Mir Nihal and his wife and the others; and they all burned with rage and impotent anger, for they could do nothing...’.\textsuperscript{19}

The necessity of compromises with the new system of governance and political authority becomes part of everyday experience for ashraf Muslims. Memories of heroism during the 1857 revolt are contrasted with the situation of the community in 1911, unable

\textsuperscript{17} Syed Ahmad Khan in his 1859 essay on \textit{The Causes of the Indian Revolt} suggested that the insularity of the rulers from the ruled, and the resultant insensitivity of government policy towards the cultural mores and temperament of Indians precipitated the rebellion. The general perception of the government’s intention to interfere in religious and cultural rituals, illustrated by the case of a letter from a missionary in Calcutta to Indian government personnel urging them to convert to Christianity, led to this crisis emerging. He thus sought to defend Muslims from the charge of being inherently disloyal. His own role in saving the lives of a number of Englishwomen and children had of course demonstrated Syed Ahmad Khan’s own loyalty to the Raj (cited in Jalal, \textit{Self and Sovereignty}, p. 39).

\textsuperscript{18} Ahmed Ali shared with William Dalrymple his memory of his grandmother describing to him how after the 1857 rebellion she was thrown out of her \textit{haveli}, and forced to take shelter in a tomb to the south of the city. Some British ‘Tommies’ found her hiding there and stripped her of her clothes to find the jewels they believed she was hiding. She had never left the family \textit{zenana} before that. See Dalrymple, \textit{City of Djinns}, p. 149.

to make similar sacrifices.\textsuperscript{20} Stray acts of political resistance such as the throwing of a bomb at the Governor-General Lord Hardinge in 1912 provide scant consolation.\textsuperscript{21} Mir Nihal’s melancholic state of being disallows the possibility of acquiring critical distance or the capacity for judgment as regards the perils of such a retreat from colonial modernity.\textsuperscript{22} This becomes manifest when Mir Nihal does not permit his son Asghar to study at the Aligarh Muslim University (founded by Syed Ahmad), for he believes that though it is a Muslim institution it is the evil-doing of the ‘Farangis’ ‘who wish to make Christians and atheists of all’.\textsuperscript{23} Asghar makes up his mind to marry Bilqeece, who is from a Mughal family but is regarded as low born because someone in her family married a prostitute or maid-servant. He faces opposition from Mir Nihal, whose conservative values come to the fore (he claims Arab descent, from a family proud of being Saiyyeds, direct descendants of the prophet.\textsuperscript{24} Mir Nihal eventually agrees to Asghar’s marriage. But Bilqeece’s later death due to neglect after child-birth and a bout of fever and her all too rapidly being replaced in Asghar’s affections by her sister Zohra indicates the decadence that has begun to overtake sections of the ashraf community. Asghar himself does not participate in the agitation against the Rowlatt Bill and his preoccupation with amorous relationships seems to rule out any engagement with politics. Indeed, the novel refers to Muslims who prosper under the apparent stability of life under British rule.\textsuperscript{25}

Bilqeece becomes a symbol of vulnerabilities in the family and community. Asghar’s neglect after their child Jehan Ara is born brings this to the fore.\textsuperscript{26} She faces the dual burden of being

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 152.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 204.
\item \textsuperscript{22} On the necessity for anti-colonial nationalists to come to terms with governmental procedures and technologies, see P. Chatterjee, ‘The Nation in Heterogenous Time’, Umut Ozkirimli ed. \textit{Nationalism and its Futures}, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 55–57.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ali, \textit{Twilight}, p. 50.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., pp. 33–34.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 264.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 210. Jalal argues that given the changes and anxieties brought about by the new conception of religious community in the wake of enumerative processes, the Muslim woman often became the repository of cultural ideals. See Jalal, \textit{Self and Sovereignty}, p. 45.
\end{itemize}
expected to enact the role of the ‘ornament of the home’, as well as remain the vehicle of traditional spiritual values. However, the symbolic role of ornament of the home was largely confined to upper class women in Muslim society.\textsuperscript{27} Prescriptions for this role were laid out in nineteenth century works like Nazir Ahmad’s \textit{The Bride's Mirror}, which though an Urdu novel, functioned like a conduct book for Muslim wives.\textsuperscript{28} Bilqeece fails to live up to such expectations; she dies in tragic circumstances at a young age. Ali criticises such rigid assumptions regarding female conduct and double standards with respect to the conduct of men in this society through this figure, complicating the nostalgic picture presented through the protagonist.

In a significant passage, Mir Nihal mourns the death of Indians in the Great War as fodder for German guns and alludes with distaste to profiteering by gravediggers and sellers of mourning shrouds during this time of outbreaks of influenza in the city, which necessitates the building of a new cemetery for the dead. The narrator notes that the Hindus were lucky insofar as they simply went to the sacred Jamuna, cremated the dead and threw away the ashes and unburned bones in the water.\textsuperscript{29} Muslims, however, were faced with the gruesome menace of shroud thieves. The narrator describes how prayers were said to mitigate the evil.

But God did not exist, perhaps; for, perchance, their feeble voices did not reach the sound proof gates of heaven situated on the seventh sky, fortified by the lower six. For the other azaans and prayers were of no avail. Death walked with hurried strides through towns and cities, devastating them, taking her fat and unending toll of lives, stalking among the dead. And Izrael, the angel of death, had not a moment to spare. From house-to-house he rushed, from door to door, snatching the souls away from human beings burning with fever yet hungry after life, wanting to live on in a world that did not care about them at all…. (Ali, \textit{Twilight}; pp. 243–45).

Though the collective descent into anomie at a time of crisis is the main satirical target here, there is a subtle criticism of religious

\textsuperscript{27} See Jalal, \textit{Self and Sovereignty}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{29} Ali, \textit{Twilight}, p. 242.
orthodoxy and obscurantism as well, which remains in tension with the nostalgic tone. Indeed, such self-conscious irony allows to an extent for a working through of the memory of collective loss, figured in such nightmarish images. Even so, there is an acknowledgement of the effects on community life of interrupted rituals of mourning. Ali is thus able to map such discontinuities in ritualised forms of community life, as well as point to weaknesses and flaws within a culture that had been subjected to inordinate pressures in recent history.

Ultimately, the loss of a mode of civilisational being is presented as a foreshadowing of events yet to transpire. It is as if the author anticipates this loss some years before the more comprehensive and further destruction in physical terms that took place during the partition. The gracious pursuit of cultivated leisure, symbolised by practices such as the flying of pigeons, kite-flying and the acquisition of a refined taste in Urdu poetry (often learnt, as Asghar does, at the feet of accomplished tawaifs (or courtesans) like Mushtari Bai (73–8)) was already disintegrating. The elegiac tone struck by the novel is thus ominous, insofar as it seems to prefigure further devastation to come. However, what might have become regressive

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30 As Ahmed Ali later told William Dalrymple, ‘The civilization I belong to — the civilization of Delhi — came into being through the mingling of two different cultures, Hindu and Muslim. That civilization flourished for one thousand years undisturbed until certain people came along and denied that that great mingling had taken place’. Ali claims that Twilight in Delhi had not been published in Pakistan and that copies of his book were sent back from Karachi, since the book was about the ‘forbidden’ city across the border. Quoted in Dalrymple, City of Djinns, p. 63. Dalrymple’s book was published in 1993, and his later sense is that Ali may have exaggerated the hostility towards his book in Pakistan. Personal communication, Dalrymple. Pakistani critic Muneeza Shamsie accords pride of place to Ali’s writings in her 1997 anthology of Pakistani writing in English. See M. Shamsie ed. Dragonfly, pp. 8–26.

31 Ali, Twilight, pp. 73–78. See Mathews’ description of the culture prevalent in Oudh state, in the Preface to his translation of Mirza Hadi Ruswa’s Umrao Jan Ada, Umrao Jan Ada, trans. David Matthews, New Delhi: Rupa, 1996, pp. viii–xiii. This novel, one of the first to be written in Urdu, foregrounds the experience of a tawaif or courtesan in more detail than in this case, of course. Aamir Mufti’s interesting, though problematic, discussion of Manto’s women characters is relevant in this context.
nostalgia is tempered through an acknowledgement of the material coordinates underpinning the continued existence of this way of life and its internal weaknesses, especially with respect to prevalent attitudes towards women from the *ailaf* (or lower) class.

*Twilight in Delhi* retains its significance as a novel that engages with certain attitudes predominantly to be found amongst the Muslim elites and middle-classes in the urban areas of India. Its pertinence for the context of the Partition is to be found in the eloquent description of the life world of this section of Muslim society, in a period when the loss of preeminence in the political sphere percolated into the cultural domain, resulting in the twin themes of nostalgia and a crippling inability to prevent the disappearance of aesthetic values cherished in the past. Even so, the sharp criticism of both internal decay and the degradation that colonial modernity brought in its wake stems from the author’s ability to retain an internal distance from the ideology of his class and community.32

As Harish Trivedi has noted, there is a curious absence of Hindu characters in this novel. This according to him is somewhat surprising, since Chandni Chowk, the locality where the action of the novel takes place, was populated at this time almost equally by Hindus and Muslims.33 Barring the brief appearance of Dr Mittra

According to Mufti, the figure of the courtesan/prostitute in Manto exposes the claim to purity of the ‘national family’, of the ‘chaste maternity’ of the nation, opening up possibilities of questioning of identity where nationalist constructions of idealised womanhood would close these down. See Mufti, *Enlightenment*, especially pp. 13–33.

32 Priya Joshi distinguishes between the state of internal exile portrayed in *Twilight in Delhi*, and later novels about the experience of exile by diasporic writers such as Salman Rushdie. While her characterisation of Ali’s novel is apt, given the emphasis on the sense of disconnection in Mir Nihal’s life, Joshi misses the more pertinent distinction between this state of being and the forced exile experienced by many Muslims (and Sikhs and Hindus) after the partition. See P. Joshi, ‘The Exile at home’, pp. 226–27. Also see Darko Suvin’s earlier cited essay charting out a typology of displacement. He distinguishes between the forced displacement faced by exiles and refugees for political reasons and the situation of émigrés and expatriates, who migrate for ideological and/or economic reasons. See Suvin, ‘Displaced Persons’, pp. 109–14.

in the last section there is scarcely any allusion to other communities, except to note that some Muslims were recent converts from Hinduism. However, this imaginative representation of life in old Delhi during the early decades of the 20th century in the novel does not depict communal tension or violence either. As Mushirul Hasan shows, inter-community relations did not deteriorate until the post Khilafat and Non-Cooperation phase. Indeed, the lines of cleavage in north India were more sharply drawn between the Sunnis and the Shias than between Hindus and Muslims. The Home Rule agitation is mentioned briefly in the novel as a movement that leaves Mir Nihal largely unaffected. While Mir Nihal holds the British Raj responsible for the loss of the finer points of ashraf culture, the process of redrawing boundaries is subtly criticised through the presentation of the protagonist’s withdrawal into himself. His overweening need to hold on to aesthetic values of yore is symptomatic of the decay that has beset this culture and is presented with a degree of tragic irony.

*Twilight in Delhi* thus presents a critical account of a section of the community retreating into a domain of private grief, preoccupied by memories of better days. Here I differ from Trivedi’s criticism of the absence of Hindu characters. Rather, there seems to be a conscious attempt to focus on a mode of civilisational being at a time of transition when community boundaries were being redrawn as a result of enumerative processes and the post-Khilafat decline

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34 Jalal shows that the First World War and its aftermath introduced for the first time an alliance of Western educated Muslims with the conglomeration of ulemas and pirs, preceding the emergence of the rainbow coalition with the Congress under Gandhi. The Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements pushed the parameters of this emergent public sphere to new limits not to be seen earlier in the agendas of either the Congress or the Muslim League. There was a sense of disillusionment with an earlier notion of loyalism to the British Raj among the Muslim ashraf classes, even as Jinnah using constitutional methods and the Ali brothers through agitational politics came to the fore. See Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, pp. 195–214 especially p. 196.

35 Mushirul Hasan, *India Partitioned*, p. 5.


in intercommunity entente, resulting in less interaction with the now increasingly dominant ‘majority’ community. The sense of the community under siege can also be linked to the experience of many Muslims after the 1857 rebellion, when the British regarded Muslims as leaders of the revolt and began a process of delinking them from important administrative positions in the colonial hierarchy, as seen above. After the reversal of fortune there was a veritable endless ‘marsiya’ or lamentation, Jalal points out. This novelistic representation of the consequent turning inwards and sense of defeat and nostalgia for a lost sense of self captures the sense of melancholy afflicting ashraf Muslims at this historical moment.

This is not to suggest, however, that the novel merely be read as a document of its times; what is more significant is the anticipation of representational techniques later used in the wake of the partition.

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38 Jalal reminds us that the creation of enumerated communities by the colonial state resulted in the emergence of a conception of community premised on religious grounds alone. The British processes of enumerating Indian society thus created notions of majority and minority drawing on the privileging of religious distinction. Representatives of the Hindu majority were equally determined to push claims as the Muslim minority. Thus a redefinition of cultural values took place at a time when the loss of spiritual meanings and perceived threat to the sacred space was increasingly in evidence. See Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, pp. 43–45. According to her analysis, the first census of 1853 included a headcount of Hindus and Muslims in which religion became the crucial factor, unlike in the home country. The decennial census introduced in 1871 continued with this emphasis on religion as the defining factor in constituting the new sense of community. Ibid., pp. 40–42. Indeed, the ‘Hindu’ community was itself being challenged from within by democratic assertions, as in the case of the 1932 stand off between Gandhi and Ambedkar on the question of separate electorates for the so-called depressed classes. See P. Chatterjee, ‘The Nation in Heterogenous Time’, p. 47.


40 LaCapra’s elucidation of Freud’s (1917 (1915)) distinction between mourning as a mode of working through and melancholy as a mode of repetitive identification is pertinent in relation to this passage. See LaCapra, *Writing History*, p. 151. There is a perceived inability to emerge from the repetitive identification with suffering in the past here, though it is the domains of cultural memory and the quotidian that allow for a partial recuperation of selfhood.
The absence of any direct references to the politically engaged sense of self that the freedom struggle had inculcated in many Muslim intellectuals is notable and illustrates the difference between Ahmed Ali’s ideas about the role of art in social transformation and that of other Progressives. For Ali, progress was ‘essentially a state of mind’. ‘Twilight in Delhi’ is thus concerned rather with shifts in the contours of cultural identity and offers a subtle critique of compensatory and regressive forms of nostalgia. Ahmed Ali thus represents the fraction of ashraf Muslims that recognised the drastic change overtaking their world and who yet sought to hold on to the memory of conceptions of the beautiful that once sustained them. After leaving for Pakistan after the Partition, Ahmed Ali did not revisit the streets he described so eloquently, given his belief that this life-world had disappeared forever. The questions of the validity of nostalgia for a past which could not provide sustenance, and the role of tradition seemingly drained of vitality by forms of anomie that colonial modernity had brought in its wake, become pertinent in the case of many of the stories and novels to be discussed later as well.

41 Ahmed Ali’s break with the Progressives resulted from his disagreement with Sajjad Zaheer on the question of adopting socialist realist models, and the idea that only representing the struggles of the proletariat could be regarded as ‘progressive’. See P. Joshi, ‘The Exile at Home’, p. 213. In contrast, a later minor novel by a stalwart of the Progressive movement, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas’s *Inqilab* (1955) foregrounds nationalist themes and political processes. This novel tells the story of India’s independence struggle through the lens of the protagonist, Anwar Ali, son of a wealthy Hindu and a prostitute, but brought up as a Muslim (a twist on the theme of Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gora*, where the Irish foundling brought up as an orthodox Hindu discovers his real identity when refused permission to light his father’s funeral pyre). The novel ends in the early 1940s, however. Abbas was to write a sequel later tracing events in his protagonist’s life until his death at the hands of both Hindus and Muslims during the violence in 1947 (*The World is my Village* (1983)). Also see Gopal’s discussion of Abbas’ ‘Progressivist’ screenplays for Bombay films directed by Raj Kapoor. See Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, Oxford: Routledge, 2005, pp. 123–45.

42 Quoted in P. Joshi, ‘The Exile at Home’, p. 213.

43 Ali, *Twilight*, pp. v–viii
Ali’s novel negotiates loss from the vantage point of the late 1930s through its use of modulated self-irony and satire. The narrative enacts a pervasive anxiety about a way of life that itself was a product of a certain mingling of cultures. The precarious over-reliance on aesthetic values to bolster the sense of self and community, especially with the turn to communal exclusivism in the political sphere, becomes a problem that defies easy resolution, indicating the extent of accumulated strains in the period prior to the partition. There are continuities with respect to such perceptions of loss in the literature about old world Delhi written after 1947. Pandey shows how Muslim writings after 1947 linked the collapse of that old world in Delhi specifically to the partition and more particularly, to the violence of September 1947. Pandey cites the case of Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi’s *Dilli ki Bipta* (1948), as a particularly moving account of the fate of a man who was forced to leave the city he had never contemplated departing from. Other memoirs such as Ebadat Barelvi’s *Asadi ke Saaye Mein* (1988) in which the author speaks of Delhi as ‘the city of the Muslims’, unparalleled in the subtlety and beauty of its culture or the grandeur of its public display, confirm this sense of a lost life world. In later works of fiction the sense of loss becomes even more pronounced, given the irrevocable and even more traumatic impact of devastating massacres. Literary remembrance of such a lost mode of being was to become even more fraught.

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44 The notion of religious identity had become hardened in its public perception. Jalal cites Kenneth Jones’ point that this ‘created a sense of community more detailed and exact than any existing prior to the creation of the census.’ In Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, p. 40. As Jalal reminds us, the term ‘communalism’ did not command the centre-stage of public discourse on Muslim identity until after 1909, when the separate or communal electorates were introduced at all levels of representation. This British construction of community, otherwise shot through with differentiations, constituted a new form of social engineering that paid little heed to class, regional, linguistic or sectarian factors. See Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, pp. 41–42.


46 Ibid., p. 135
High Politics and Divided Hearts: the ‘Politics of Mention’

The more explicitly political sense of self and the contradictions that stemmed from strident identitarian self definitions are portrayed in Mumtaz Shah Nawaz’s *The Heart Divided*. The novel was written between 1943 and 1948, and the period between 1930–42 is depicted in the narrative. The author did not revise her novel before her death; it thus contains many grammatical and typographical errors. Nevertheless, it presents a lively and readable account of the way important debates in the sphere of high politics of the 1930s and 40s percolated into middle-class life at critical moments when the rift between the communities widened, leading to the eventual demand for a separate nation. The experiences of Zohra, the protagonist, seem to be based on memories of the author’s own participation in the struggle for

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47 Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, granddaughter of Muslim League leader Muhammad Shafi, was active during the freedom struggle as a member of the Congress party until 1940, when the Lahore resolution of the Muslim League was passed. Her relationship with the Muslim League became stronger during the next two years, and after 1943 she became a worker for the Muslim League. Though she remained staunchly socialist in her outlook, by 1945 she had begun to acknowledge the fact that a separate state of Pakistan had become inevitable. She set up a women’s branch of the Muslim League in the Punjab and helped in organising relief work for victims of communal riots. Shah Nawaz was arrested and imprisoned by the Unionist government of the Punjab during this time. After these eventful years she went back to creative writing, and began to write this novel, while still helping in trying to rehabilitate Muslim refugees pouring in from India. The first draft was completed by March 1948, and in the same year she was asked to talk on Pakistan and Kashmir in the United States by the New York Herald Tribune. The United Nations was discussing the Kashmir situation of this time and she was keen to explore possibilities for publication of her novel. But on 15th April 1948 an American aircraft on which Mumtaz Shah Nawaz was travelling crashed near Shannon, Ireland, killing all those on board. Her life was thus tragically cut short. See Preface by Ahmad Shah Nawaz in Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, *The Heart Divided*. Lahore: ASR Publications, 1957 (rpt 1990), pp. i–v.

48 Shah Nawaz’s family eventually published the novel in 1957.
Witnessing Partition

independence. Zohra represents the voice of the new generation of young Muslim women belonging to well-to-do ashraf families who were beginning to take on leadership roles, thus redefining the roles laid out for them in the social milieu to which they belonged.

For the purposes of this analysis, the selective representation of strands of the nationalist movement and the attempt to interweave the personal and the political domains are of particular interest. In his study of the different ways in which the narrative of the freedom struggle is represented in textbooks in India and Pakistan, Krishna Kumar refers to the ‘politics of mention’, or the decision to include or exclude an event or part of an event in the historical narrative. He relates this to the politics of memory, integral to the discipline of history and linked to the process of identity building in a national context. While Shah Nawaz’s historical novel is an early effort reflecting the rawness of recent experience, it also has the strengths of an autobiographical narrative, imaginatively drawing on memories of the processes leading up to 1947. However, the pressures of Pakistani (Muslim League) nationalism seem to bear down on the second half of the novel, indicating the limitations of fictional narratives in which the politics of memory and identity construction predominate. The ‘politics of mention’ becomes pertinent in this context, even allowing for the difference between historical narratives and historical fiction as modes of constructing the past. Indeed, for Kumar, this novel provides crucial insights into the different frames of perception of the past in India and Pakistan. Furthermore, the motif of romance-across-the-divide becomes a way of articulating anxieties about difference in the novel, especially in terms of religious community and class. Such anxieties are not entirely satisfactorily resolved in the narrative.

The surcharged political climate of the 1930s forms the backdrop to the novel, set in North-west India in undivided Punjab. The conflict within Zohra’s family that results from her decision to join her friend in a tonga without her burqa is an indicator of the perspective brought to bear by the writer, with an emphasis on the

49 K. Kumar, Prejudice and Pride, p. 72.
50 Ibid., pp. 40–41.
51 Cleary discusses similar anxieties in romance-across-the-divide narratives in Northern Ireland. See Cleary, Literature, Partition and the Nation State, especially pp. 112–15.
question of autonomy of choice for women in the public sphere and a critical view of orthodox attitudes towards women.\(^{52}\) Zohra’s activist friend Mohini’s grandfather Diwan Jawala Prashad Kaul, who speaks in chaste Urdu, notes that unlike during the period of the Khilafat movement Muslims had not participated in the Dandi March and the Civil Disobedience movement. An old friend, Sheikh Jamaluddin, complains that the Congress had not taken the Muslims into confidence this time and had gone into the movement without the support of the League. When reminded that the Pathans had indeed supported the struggle in the North-west, his reply is that they were the exceptions. Zohra, however, is upset that the Hindu community were making sacrifices for freedom, while the Muslims sat idle.\(^{53}\) Shah Nawaz thus emphasises at the outset the falling off from the phase of ‘Hindu–Muslim unity’ earlier alluded to, as well as increased dissonance within each community.\(^{54}\)

One of the key factors in this breakdown of relationships and trust cited in the narrative is the influence of the ‘communal’ Hindu Mahasabha, which exerted pressure upon the Congress to take a ‘stiffer’ attitude vis-à-vis the Muslims. Later, Jamaluddin points out that the proposed constitution for the country presented in the Nehru report did grave injustice to the Muslims by reducing their majorities in the provinces of Punjab and Bengal to such an extent that they were reduced to minorities in the proposed legislatures, despite being 56 percent of the population in Punjab and

\(^{52}\) See Shah Nawaz, *Heart Divided*, pp. 7–17. For a comparable non-fictional account of such a decision by a Muslim woman to emerge into mixed society without a burqa in the same period (1933), see Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *From Purdah to Parliament*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1963, Revised and expanded 1998, pp. 70–71.

\(^{53}\) Shah Nawaz, *Heart Divided*, pp. 18–27.

\(^{54}\) As Mushirul Hasan has shown, the United Provinces witnessed a number of riots in 1923, in 1926 and in 1927, while communal violence also occurred in Punjab, Bengal and other places in southern and western India in those years. The most immediate causes were said to be cow slaughter and music being played in front of mosques. Furthermore, ‘After 1928, many Muslims who had earlier joined Congress became increasingly hostile to its activities. This was particularly evident during the civil disobedience movement. In marked contrast to the non-cooperation days, Muslims participated in very small numbers in civil disobedience’. Cited in K. Kumar, pp. 148, 156. Also see Hasan, *From Pluralism*, p. 73.
Thus came the need for Jinnah’s fourteen points; the resulting deadlock is blamed on the Congress leaders’ intransigence. Indeed, Mushirul Hasan describes the Nehru report as ‘the last straw for the Congress-Muslim relationship’ (quoted in K. Kumar, 156). The novel thus dramatises the breakdown of political entente through this exchange between friends from the elite section of society.

The failed cross-border romance between Zohra’s brother Habib and Mohini, her activist friend symbolically enacts the rift between communities. This romance across the religious divide proves to be unacceptable to his highly educated father, as well as to

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55 In her autobiographical account, Mumtaz’s mother Jahan Ara Shahnawaz writes about Motilal Nehru’s affection for her and her daughter Mumtaz. She refers in some detail to the Nehru report and its repercussions as well; presumably her recollections influenced this novelistic rendering. See Jahan Ara Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter: A Political Autobiography*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1971 (rpt 2002), pp. 74, 83–84. Jahan Ara was representative of the Muslim League at the Second Round Table Conference, referred to in the novel and her perceptions are obviously the basis for her daughter’s novelistic account. See Jahan Ara Shahnawaz, *Father and Daughter*, pp.103–23.

56 Shah Nawaz, *Heart Divided*, pp. 43–44. As David Page reminds us, Nehru was primarily responsible for the report presented by the Nehru committee in 1928, though Motilal Nehru chaired the committee. The report tried to show that Muslims of the provinces of Punjab and Bengal were better off without reservation. Jawaharlal’s condemnation of the ‘communal’ organisations for not wanting to change the existing structure of society and his faith that in a free India political parties would be formed on the basis of economic considerations, rather than religious identity, were expressed in this report. However, his impatience with other committee members who did not agree with his views and his attempt to push the report through, rather than negotiate terms, proved to be a break with the Congress tradition. The serious disagreement with other committee members such as Shuiab Qureishi on the issue of separate electorates received wide publicity after the phenomenal success of the report, once published. Stories highlighting Nehru’s imperious style of functioning consolidated certain notions of Hindu arrogance and Congress bias. See Page, *Prelude to Partition* in Hasan ed. *The Partition Omnibus*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982 (rpt 2002), pp. 168–74. However, Nehru’s socialist convictions led him to emphasise a basis for community other than that which enumerative processes had set into place.
Mohini’s parents. Habib and Mohini’s growing attachment to one another becomes a significant challenge to prejudices stemming from communitarian exclusivism and social conservatism. The depiction of Mohini’s tragic death at a young age on account of tuberculosis contracted in jail after a nationalist demonstration is rather melodramatic in tone.\(^57\) The personal domain acquires a symbolic significance, nevertheless, as the failure of the two families to appreciate the strong feelings of the two young people for one another is interwoven with references to the breakdown of dialogue between communities at the level of ‘high’ politics. Ultimately the symbolic desire for reconciliation between communities, projected in the form of this romance, is doomed to remain unfulfilled.\(^58\)

Mohini’s grandfather tells her, ‘You believe in Hindu–Muslim unity without which our high ideals cannot be realised. I do believe in it. But this is not the way to achieve it. Such marriages only antagonise the two peoples and push them further apart. You want to pull them closer together and you feel that this is the way. But believe me, child, there is no shortcut to understanding, nor can antagonists be cemented with bonds of relationship.’\(^59\) Diwan Kaul’s prejudices mirror those of the Sheikh family to which Habib belongs; they remained good friends but could never be accepted as relatives in marriage. The tension between the nationalist emphasis on reform and reconciliation (even while accepting extant social practices and taboos relating to consanguinity up to a point) and marital choices made at an individual level that might challenge such taboos, thus becomes clear.\(^60\)

The novel makes a sketchy reference to the Unionist party as ‘reactionary feudal landlords’ under the influence of the British,


\(^{58}\) Also see Cleary’s discussion of the problems with romance narratives in the context of Northern Ireland, *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State*, especially pp. 112–13.


\(^{60}\) Notions of ritual purity underpinned patterns of endogamy and commensality in the Punjab, often expressing the exclusivity of *jatis* or castes. See Sethi, ‘The Creation of Religious Identities’, unpublished dissertation, p. 74. There were exceptions, nonetheless. For example, the Punjabi writer Kartar Singh Duggal married into a Muslim family. See biographical note in Cowasjee and Duggal eds. *Orphans of the Storm*, p. 343.
whether Hindu or Muslim.\textsuperscript{61} It is as if the narrative is not quite able to account for the diminishing influence of the Muslim League at this time after Jinnah’s decision to go into self-exile. This situation is dramatised as Jamaluddin confronts his brother Fakhruddin, who has joined the Unionist party, in the next assembly election.\textsuperscript{62} Meanwhile, Zohra joins the Congress.\textsuperscript{63} The depiction of the loss of Zohra’s sister Sughra’s baby on account of the lack of knowledge of modern medicine amongst her in-laws constitutes a sharp criticism of obscurantist attitudes prevalent in elite families of the Muslim community, as well as of the slow pace of internal reform. Ironically, Sughra becomes an ardent proponent of the Muslim League’s ideology, believing in the principle that Muslims must fight on the basis of ‘Muslim interests’ and that the Congress could never represent such interests.\textsuperscript{64} The political differences between the two sisters are initially weighted in favour of the protagonist, with her nationalist sympathies.

Sughra, however, refers to ‘nationalist’ Muslims as the chief barrier between the League and the Congress, as ‘Hindu stooges’ who do not represent the Muslim masses.\textsuperscript{65} Zohra is critical of such oversimplification and instead stresses the contribution of Muslims in the Congress, with a long history of service and sacrifices. According to Sughra, in the villages of the interiors at the time of Muslim prayers Hindus had come out in bands, beating drums and shouting anti-Muslim slogans. A dead pig had been thrown into a mosque, leading to a riot breaking out. At other places Muslims were not allowed to use the communal well since Hindus considered them unclean, while rioting had taken place in the different states.\textsuperscript{66} Indeed, as Anil Sethi points out, the growing consciousness of the asymmetrical application of defilement taboos led to considerable

\textsuperscript{62} Shah Nawaz, Heart Divided, p. 242.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p. 273.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., p. 285.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p. 292.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., pp. 320–24. Many such local grievances as a further result of shifts in the politics of patronage led to a groundswell of discontent emerging in
rancour and indignation amongst the Muslim community with the advent of colonial modernity in the Punjab.67

At this point the two sisters seem to have irreconcilable differences, as they cling to their respective ideological positions; regressive feudal nostalgia, on the one hand, and Congress nationalism on the other.68 The sense of irrational anxiety is amplified with reference to the educational framework set out by Gandhi known as

the Muslim community with respect to the Congress governments that had come to power after the 1937 elections in the provinces, as Mushirul Hasan shows. The consolidation of the Muslim League, the crystallisation of Muslim demands and the pitching of these demands at a higher level with the emphasis on future constitutional arrangements being made not on the basis of population but on the basis of communities, with Muslims being treated on complete equality with Hindus and no constitutional change being made without the consent and approval of the two communities, was largely the result of two and half years of Congress rule in the provinces, Hasan convincingly demonstrates. See Introduction in M. Hasan ed. India’s Partition, pp. 17–18, 26.

67 Sethi documents at length the prevalence of such commensal taboos with respect to eating and drinking together in the Punjab between 1850–1920. Even the water carriers at railway stations were marked as carrying ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim’ water. In the case of wells, different vessels were used to draw water. See Sethi, ‘The Creation of Religious Identities’, unpublished dissertation especially Ch. 2, pp. 72–113. However, an intensification of such taboos may have occurred later at such a time of communal mobilisation. Personal communication, Anil Sethi. After the tensions of the 1920s, ‘reform’ in the Punjab advocated by leaders such as Lala Lajpat Rai, often in the name of Hindu unity, extended up to mingling and inter-dining with some of the lower castes but not to the Muslims. Ibid., pp. 120–36. Sethi also shows that while such practices based on conceptions of purity and pollution might have been accepted earlier, in the 1920s pamphlets such as ‘Chhut-Chhat’ presented a hyperbolic criticism of Hindu taboos for sectarian ends. Such pamphlets were in turn published in response to the writings of Hindu publicists such as Dayanand Saraswati, whose tract Satyarth Prakash had considerable influence on Punjabi Hindus in its insinuations against Muslims, while extolling ‘Arya’ ideals. Unlike Diwan Kaul, writer Amrita Pritam rebelled against taboos, causing changes in such practices in her family, while Hindus such as Prakash Tandon expressed a sense of guilt about such taboos. Ibid., pp. 114–20. Also see her personal account of defiance of such taboos in Pritam, ‘Nineteen Forty-Seven’ in Ahmad Salim ed. ‘Nineteen Forty-Seven’. Lahore 1947, pp. 183–86.

68 Shah Nawaz, Heart Divided, pp. 320–24.
the Wardha scheme. This system of basic education is travestied in the description put forward by some Muslim League workers in the narrative. They refer to the scheme as an attempt to impose Hindu culture on Muslims, with children being forced to give up the traditional Muslim greeting and Hindi being imposed on children, rather than Urdu being taught to them, with Arabic and Persian words being weeded out from the Hindustani language. Furthermore, the song ‘Bande Mataram’ is spoken of as being forced down their children’s throats; this was considered especially serious given its supposedly anti-Muslim tenor.

As Krishna Kumar points out, this kind of description of the Basic Education scheme was current amongst a section of the Muslim elite during this period, at times deliberately perpetuated to exacerbate anxieties about Hindu dominance. Pakistani textbooks still condemn the Basic Education scheme as part of a Hindu conspiracy, without attempting to fully come to terms with Gandhi’s philosophical drift which led him to emphasise education in one’s mother tongue and the learning of crafts in schools.

It is, of course, possible that in the implementation of this scheme at the grassroots level Gandhi’s ideas were misrepresented in the service of communal ideology. This communitarian misrecognition of Gandhi’s reformist agenda is depicted somewhat uncritically in the novel, which lacks a deeper historical sense of the problems with language based identity assertion. The history of language politics in the Punjab can be traced back to the 1880s when, as Sethi argues, the Hunter Commission on Indian Education (1882) spuriously identified language and script with religion.

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69 Also see Pyarelal’s description of the Nai Talim or the Basic Education scheme introduced by Gandhi. See Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi*, pp. 114–18.
72 K Kumar, p. 184.
This led to the floating of language propagation societies by community organisations such as the Bhasha and Sanskrit Pracharini Sabhas and the Anjuman-I-Himayat Urdu in Lahore and other major cities.\textsuperscript{73} Furthermore, the Singh Sabha representatives submitted a long memorandum to the Commission in support of Punjabi written in Gurmukhi, for which such Sabhas became zealous crusaders.\textsuperscript{74} Anxieties about the status of ‘minority’ languages were thus rife and were played upon by publicists and ideologues in the years leading up to the 1930s.

Shortly after the conference of the Muslim League, Sughra meets Kamal, a young Muslim League activist with whom she forms a close attachment. He describes to her the possibility of a separate Muslim state being formed. This is the first explicit reference in the novel to the partition.\textsuperscript{75} According to him, the new state would include Punjab, the frontier province, Kashmir, Sindh and Baluchistan along with another state in Bengal in alliance with it. The reason for this was the inability of the League to function with the Congress.\textsuperscript{76} The portrayal of Kamal as a source of fascination in erotic and political terms is somewhat ambivalent, however, given his personal history as a philanderer.

Zohra, meanwhile, becomes a college teacher, despite the opposition from her family; she meets Ahmad, the son of her father’s former head clerk, who teaches at a college in Lahore. Ahmad had been with the Congress, but left the party subsequently. He questions her ‘naïve’ ideas about nationalism, arguing that Muslims felt the love for their homeland as strongly as Hindus, but that nationalism in India had simply become an assertion of the Congress way and that way alone. Ahmad’s view is that a plebiscite would be the best way of helping the disparate views in existence to be articulated, given that unity could only come about on the basis of each nationality being granted the right to self-determination.\textsuperscript{77} This conversation between Zohra and Ahmad takes place just

\textsuperscript{73} Sethi, ‘The Creation of Religious Identities’, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{74} Oberoi, \textit{The Construction of Religious Boundaries}, p. 349.
\textsuperscript{75} Shah Nawaz, \textit{Heart Divided}, p. 361.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., pp. 367–86.
\textsuperscript{77} ‘The language of ‘nationality’ and ‘self-determination’ was partly derived from the experience of the Soviet Union as a multi-national state. However, as Mushirul Hasan points out, during the early 1940s
before they attend a meeting of workers organised by the Communist Party. The slogan of ‘a new world’ raised by the workers remains with her as she returns home that evening.\textsuperscript{78} The narrative seems to be driven at this point by the imperative of justifying Zohra’s eventual switch of loyalties. The rationale for her shift in political ideology, for which the personal realm becomes the fulcrum, is charted in later episodes.

Zohra and Ahmad draw closer to one another, despite her awareness that her family would never countenance such a marriage to someone from a lower-class family. Ahmad is portrayed as a proponent of moderate and rational views, for he seeks to mediate between Prof. Ilmuddin and Vijay, Mohini’s younger brother, who represents the Congress and accuses the League of propagating a philosophy of hatred. It is at this juncture that Ahmad is arrested under the Defence of India rules for his allegedly seditious activities. Zohra is shocked at the thought of Ahmad being jailed for offences he had not committed, with the prospect of torture awaiting him, and realises that she loves him.\textsuperscript{79} Her personal involvement with him thus intersects with public concerns, shared political commitment underlying mutual desire. Furthermore, the utopian aspirations of the young lovers are represented in sharp contrast to the foundering of understanding at the level of political community.

The growing influence of ‘semi-fascist’ Hindu organisations like the RSSS (sic) is stressed.\textsuperscript{80} Events such as the visit by the Cripps Mission are interwoven with conflicts in the personal sphere. Issues relating to parity and recognition of the aspirations of the ‘other’ community resonate in the domain of relationships, as the conflict within Zohra’s family sharpens as a result of her decision to

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the Communist Party of India changed its line, describing the Muslim League as the party representing the Indian Muslim Bourgeoisie and not as a stooge of the British as before, mainly on account of the threat of Axis powers invading India and the need for a National Democratic Front comprising the two parties. The party leadership thus instructed the ‘Muslim Communists’ to join the League. See Introduction in M. Hasan ed. \textit{India Partitioned}, p. 20.
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\textsuperscript{78} Shah Nawaz, \textit{Heart Divided}, p. 427.
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\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 438.
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\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., p. 441.
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marry Ahmad.\textsuperscript{81} Even though Zohra initially feels that she would be out of place in the Muslim League, her sister is able to eventually persuade her to join.\textsuperscript{82} Her belief that she understands Muslim women better and that the League was no longer just the party of rich Muslims but a genuinely people-based party, leads Zohra to this decision. Ahmad reminds her of the need to continue trying for a settlement between the Congress and the League on the basis of self-determination, despite the fact that they realise that the scope for this seemed to be receding day by day.\textsuperscript{83} The romanticism underlying the drift towards the ‘parallel’ nationalism of the Muslim League for many young Muslims is underlined in this episode.

In a moving passage, Vijay describes the bickering, bargaining, and disunity which he witnessed in Delhi, and speaks of his anguish.

\textsuperscript{81} Shaikh has provided an effective critique of this notion of parity that stemmed from the exclusivist idea of the community that developed among certain Muslim intellectuals from the nineteenth century onwards. The idea of representation of the community by certain individuals who held the sole prerogative of presenting the claims made by the community as a whole was problematic from the outset. Jinnah thus donned the mantle of the ‘sole spokesman’, incessantly demanding the right of Muslims to a separate set of laws and separate territory derived from a notion of the Islamic code, nevertheless working within the constitutional framework towards a multinational state in which non-Muslims and Muslims would supposedly have equal say. But as Shaikh argues, this privileging of the rights of the community defined in the way by the Muslim League undercut the notion of individual rights that is at the foundation of liberal-democratic practice. Furthermore, what was really at stake was the institutionalisation of politics on the basis that the Congress could not represent Muslims; even though the Muslim community was internally differentiated, this really did not matter to the League. See Shaikh, ‘Muslims and Political Representation in Colonial India: The Making of Pakistan’ in Hasan ed. India’s Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization, pp. 81–101.

\textsuperscript{82} Shah Nawaz, Heart Divided, pp. 466–72.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 478. The need to explain her own political transformation seems to drive this section of Shah Nawaz’s narrative. Jahan Ara Shahnawaz describes in her memoir her daughter’s loss of faith in ‘nationalism’ during the Parliamentary Delegation and Cabinet Mission talks, after which she joined the Muslim League, also as a result of Jinnah’s charisma. See Jahan Ara Shahnawaz, pp. 173–74.
at the acceptance of the principle of vivisection, foreseeing ‘the sea of blood and tears’ to come. Vijay shares his (Gandhian) desire to keep his opponents with India through love, and Habib responds to this saying that if they were many more like him, the Muslims would not have wished to break away. This contrary perspective, though articulated in a somewhat sentimental vein, is significant. For this exchange occurs just before the novel ends with a reconciliation between Zohra’s sister Sughra and her husband Mansur, as they envisage a future together in the nation soon to be born. “Towards Pakistan!” He said triumphantly. This affirmative conclusion sits uneasily with the doubts and anxieties expressed by Vijay and Habib prior to this, and may be seen as a hurried imposition of a triumphalist closure on a narrative otherwise marked at so many points by hesitancy and indeterminacy and the perception of significant differences within Muslim families and the community. The concluding sense of being uplifted and the underlying message as regards the necessity of the formation of Pakistan rings somewhat false, however. The underlying anxieties and contradictory pulls of the narrative are uneasily resolved in Sughra’s movement away from transgressive romance (represented by Kamal) back to a kind of ‘realism’ in the form of reconciliation with Mansur. This narrative strategy, typical of the realist novel, leads to a containment of the dissident energies that characterised the first part.

Even so, as Shah Nawaz’s novel ends in 1942, with a sense of hope and idealism amongst supporters of the Pakistan demand, the psychological costs of the growing distance between communities become evident. Identity politics led to demands being made on the basis of religious affiliation and the predominance of interest groups positing allegiance to a unitary notion of national identity.

84 Shah Nawaz, Heart Divided, p. 480.
85 Ibid., p. 480–41.
86 Also see Cleary for a discussion of similar narrative strategies adopted in romance narratives in the context of Northern Ireland. See Cleary, Literature, Partition and the Nation State, pp. 114–15.
87 One can only speculate as regards the sequel to The Heart Divided, which was to focus on the years 1942–46 as a reminder to the Pakistani peoples of the sacrifices made to achieve the goal of Pakistan, which was being tarnished even in those early years during Shah Nawaz’s own lifetime. See Preface by Ahmed Shah Nawaz in Mumtaz Shah Nawaz v. Also see Jahanara Shah Nawaz, Father and Daughter, pp. 222–23.
The interweaving of the public and personal domains illuminates the debates and processes narrativised here, giving us a sense of the ideological differences within the community. However, the personal domain is represented as susceptible to the pressures of the public, whether in the case of earlier taboos against intermarriage, or the sharpened sense of hostility between communities in the new historical conjuncture. While the inter-religious romance between Mohini and Habib remains tragically unfulfilled, the romance across the class divide between Zohra and Ahmad comes to fruition, as she turns towards the Muslim League’s ideology. Shah Nawaz is thus not able to quite retain towards the end the internal distance from this ideology that enabled the questioning of its precepts and assumptions in the first part of the novel. This indicates serious limitations of the novel’s attempt to bear witness to the prehistory of the partition, despite the near-documentary style descriptions of political debates.

Furthermore, many other Muslim groups such as the socialists, the Congress Muslims of Azad’s generation, the ulama in the Jamiyat al-ulama, the Ahl-i-Hadith, the Khudai Khidmatgars and the Momins, all groups which repudiated the two-nation theory for different reasons and stayed with the idea of a united India, find little direct representation, except by inference, through the protagonist’s stance in the earlier sections of the novel. The point of view of ‘nationalist’ Muslims is thus not really done justice to in the narrative, on account of the politics of mention, which leads to certain memories being selectively prioritised. The ideology of Pakistani nationalism finds expression at the end instead. Indeed,

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89 The Nationalist Muslim Party had been formed in 1928 by Azad and others, but did not last for long. See Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, N.P.: Govt. of Maharashtra, 1940 (rpt 1990), p. 322. Ambedkar’s essay, written in 1940, argues the case for acceptance of the Pakistan demand after weighing all the different considerations. Ibid., especially pp. 363–37. Partha Chatterjee makes an incisive analysis of Ambedkar’s position in this essay. See P. Chatterjee, ‘The Nation in Heterogeneous Time’, pp. 51–54.
the memory of those Muslims who did not change allegiances, such as the Khudai Khidmatgars, who in some cases even migrated from the Northwest Frontier Province to India, continues to remain problematic for the Pakistani nation–state.\footnote{For a discussion of the memories of some Khudai Khidmatgars, followers of the Frontier Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, see Mukulika Banerjee, ‘Partition and the North West Frontier: Memories of some Khudai Khidmatgars’ in Suvir Kaul ed. The Partitions of Memory, pp. 30–73.}

Nevertheless, in the first part of the novel, the protagonist Zohra projects the viewpoint and sympathies of many Muslims who were either independent, or part of the Congress and supporters of joint political action against colonial rule for a unified India. It is this ambiguity that lends interest to a narrative that may otherwise have easily fallen prey to the tendency to erase such uncomfortable memories. The author’s recording of such conflicts within the community illustrates the difficulty faced by so many Muslims in making a political choice that was likely to be irreversible once the two nation–states were formed. Disturbing symptoms of historical trauma do make their presence felt, which are assuaged through the accumulation of detail about debates in the realm of high–politics and a realist closure that goes against the grain of such anxieties expressed in the first part of the novel.

The predominance of the codes and devices of a social realist mode of writing that provides a thick description and keen social observation in a period of transition can be attributed, as Joe Cleary argues, to the perceived need to provide a documentary account with as much transparency as possible, to reach out to as wide an audience as possible.\footnote{Cleary, Literature, Partition and the Nation State, p. 194.} As Cleary suggests, such social realist novels are often attempted in contexts (such as that of decolonising societies) where the realisation of such novels is most difficult.\footnote{Ibid.} The context of imminent decolonisation and division in the subcontinent posed special problems, as we have seen. The historical processes leading up to the partition had their impact on cultural and civilisational modes of being, often most sharply registered in minority communities soon to be fractured and displaced. This often led to selective historicisation, even in novels.
that attempted a degree of verisimilitude. In *Twilight in Delhi* the social world of ashraf Muslims is represented with a critical view of both feudal nostalgia and internal decay, while in *The Heart Divided*, political debates and their immediate ramifications in the personal realm in the 1930s and 40s are presented in documentary style with an approximation of realism. The degree of difficulty for novelists writing in this mode would get further accentuated in the case of attempts to represent the cataclysmic changes brought about by 1946–47.

**Inner Courtyards Split Asunder: Pakistan as Social Reality**

There were few direct allusions to the partition in writing immediately after the event in Pakistan, given that the struggle for the achievement of the Pakistan demand was deemed a necessary one involving heroic sacrifices in official accounts. As Mir and Mir point out, the partition divided the Urdu literary community in two, even though writing by Pakistani Progressives continued to criticise what was perceived as a neo-colonial state. The All Pakistan Progressive Writers Association was eventually formed in 1949. However, the Pakistani establishment cracked down on the Progressives, terming them fifth columnists and enemies of the state. Such coercive measures led to writers such as Sajjad Zaheer and Faiz Ahmad Faiz (who had been deputed by the CPI to assist

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93 For a dissenting account by a woman Parliamentarian of the formation of the nascent Pakistani state and the difficulties and compromises that were part of this process, see Begum Ikramullah’s memoir *From Purdah to Parliament* (1963). Also see Jahan Ara Shahnawaz’s earlier cited memoir *Father and Daughter*. For a sharp criticism of the failure of Pakistan’s efforts to move towards constitutional democracy by Tariq Ali, *Can Pakistan Survive? The Death of a State*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983. Talbot’s historical study is useful as well. See Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998 (rpt 1999).


95 Mir and Mir discuss the history of this Association and its eventual decline. Ibid., pp. 15–21.
the movement in Pakistan) being imprisoned in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case in 1951.\(^96\) Faiz’s poem ‘Subh-e-Azadi’ (trans. ‘Freedom’s Dawn’ (August 1947)) clearly articulated the ambivalences of the achievement of freedom from colonial rule: \(^97\)

This leprous daybreak, dawn night’s fangs have mangled —

This is not that long-looked forward break of day... (Faiz trans. Kiernan)\(^{123}\).

The few novels that addressed the issues of dislocation and violence had to negotiate the minefield of nationalist sentiment and find indirect ways to articulate dissenting views. As mentioned earlier, a tapestry of refugee/mohajir experience came into being, differentiated in terms of class as well as place of origin and eventual arrival. The variegated nature of experiences of both exile and self-exile would become visible to a greater extent in later writing. As an early example, we may contrast the depiction of ashraf Muslim families in the novels previously discussed with that in Khadija Mastur’s *Aangan* (1952 trans. *Inner Courtyard* 2000).\(^98\)

This novel, written after the partition by a well-known Pakistani Progressive, part of the ‘Savera group’ is set in the 1930s and 40s.\(^99\) While Shah Nawaz focuses on Punjabi Muslim families, Mastur takes up the predicament of Muslim families from Uttar Pradesh who become *mohajirs* or migrants. The novel represents in a realist mode tensions in the inner spaces of Muslim households, with keen insight into the changing dynamics of intimate interaction. As Aijaz Ahmad points out, the protagonist Aaliya, daughter of a landowning family in decline, experiences the great political forces of the time, the Congress, the Muslim League and the Communist Party, largely from within the household. Her family is caught, as he argues, between the decayed mores of a moribund class and the whirlwind variants of national politics.\(^100\)

In the last section of the novel there is a nuanced depiction of ideological conflicts in this Muslim family from Uttar Pradesh.

\(^{96}\) Ibid., p. 16.  
\(^{98}\) Khadija Mastur (1927–82) was associated with the Progressive Writers Association and wrote several collections of short stories and two novels, *Aangan* and *Zamin*. See biographical note in *Inner Courtyard*, trans. N. Hussain.  
\(^{99}\) Mir and Mir, p. 17.  
\(^{100}\) Ahmad, *In the Mirror of Urdu*, pp. 213–15.
Congressman Barre Chacha is shattered by the thought of the division of the land and the communal slaughter that took place at the time.\textsuperscript{101} The bitterness in the family resulting from protagonist Aaliya’s mother Amma’s decision to migrate to Pakistan, leaving Barre Chacha’s family behind, is portrayed with sensitivity, as is Aaliya’s loneliness and yearning for her extended family after migration.\textsuperscript{102} However, unlike the kinds of idealism depicted in the previous novels, whether in terms of aesthetic values or on the basis of the idea of a separate nation, here material realities concerning the allotment of evacuee property to migrants and the need to re-establish oneself supplant such sentimental longing. For protagonist Aaliya there is a sense of links being severed once and for all, especially since she initially receives no letters from India.\textsuperscript{103} The breakdown of communication during the partition affects such divided families most acutely. The break with India is complete with the news of Barre Chacha’s murder at the hands of a Hindu. For Amma this confirms her bitterness towards the land left behind, in whose service Barre Chacha died.\textsuperscript{104} Aaliya is affected strongly by this news as well. Even so, the death of the ‘nationalist Muslim’ uncle at the hands of intolerant Hindus seemingly closes a chapter; for the mohajirs return becomes impossible. The luxury of nostalgia is in any case depicted as unavailable for such ordinary Muslims seeking to rebuild shattered lives.

Furthermore, Aaliya begins to discover the mixed motives of many in the newly formed state of Pakistan as she emerges into the public sphere to work as a teacher. Her entry into the workplace is enabling for her but also necessitates a sharper political awareness.\textsuperscript{105} For repressive acts by the newly formed Pakistani state aimed at Communists indicate a disturbing direction that radically qualifies any euphoria about the achievement of the Pakistan demand.\textsuperscript{106} Such political repression even breaks the will of former activists such as Safdar, whom Aaliya eventually refuses to marry when his changed

\textsuperscript{101} Mastur, \textit{Inner Courtyard}, p. 219.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., pp. 222–30.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p. 231.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 233.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p. 233–35.

\textsuperscript{106} For an account of the Safety and Security Acts under which the character Safdar is detained, see footnote 106, \textit{Inner Courtyard}, pp. 265–67.
convictions are revealed.\textsuperscript{107} However, the emphasis on further struggles and disillusionment that awaits them hints that the logic of identity politics could only go so far. Rather than repeating comforting assumptions derived from nationalist ideology, the novel instead indicates the need for new alliances and solidarities as new fractures appear. The romance of the achieved nation is shown to be brittle, replaced here by a realism of attitude based on Progressive ideas and values. Even so, Ahmad points out that as a refugee making her way, Aaliya does discover a narrow and painful kind of freedom, which is, nevertheless, a freedom of sorts.\textsuperscript{108} Although at times simplistic explanations appear (the Partition is attributed to the Machiavellian workings of the British), the interrogation of the ethical basis for nation building is significant as an early expression of dissent. Later novels from Pakistan by Abdullah Hussein and Intizar Husain were to engage at a deeper level with the differentiated historical trauma of the partition, initiating a dialogic negotiation with the past that was perhaps initially not possible, given the ideological demands of Pakistani nationalism.

In an argument that has a bearing on this discussion, LaCapra takes the notions of ‘acting out’ and ‘working through’ from Freudian psychoanalysis (cited in the Introduction) and seeks to apply them in the context of historical/cultural studies. In his view, ‘acting out’ is related to a repetition compulsion.\textsuperscript{109} The tendency to repeat something compulsively and relive the past, the sense of being haunted by ghosts, of existing in the present while still in the past without any distance from it are symptoms of this state of being.\textsuperscript{110} Victims of traumatic events relive such occurrences as flashbacks or in the form of nightmares, while words may be compulsively repeated that do not seem to have meaning but are taken from another situation and place. LaCapra relates this to Freud’s conception of the death drive in which the repetition of traumatic, often violent scenes, take place in a way that is both destructive and self-destructive. Working through, on the other hand, allows for an ethical and political agency to be reacquired through an attempt

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., pp. 250–51.
\textsuperscript{108} Ahmad, \textit{In the Mirror of Urdu}, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{109} LaCapra, \textit{Writing History}, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., p. 143.
to gain a critical distance from a problem.\textsuperscript{111} Furthermore, as LaCapra argues, there is often a resistance to the working through of the memory of a founding trauma.\textsuperscript{112} The dialogic relation with the past may take the form of identity politics, sometimes without adequate critical testing of identity definitions. LaCapra’s analytical distinction is pertinent in relation to early novels about the partition; with the further qualification that working through the trauma of ambivalent situations in which victims became victimisers may have been even more difficult.

Shah Nawaz’s documentary style narrative seems to relive the recent past, acting out the dilemmas and historical trauma faced by the author and the community, without achieving a sufficient sense of critical distance from the memory of the collective experience, in a novel that ends before the actual event. Mastur’s novel, on the other hand, gives us an account of the distortions that identity politics could lead to and the limitations of unitary definitions of national identity in Pakistan from a Progressive woman writer’s point of view. The focus at the end of the novel is mainly on the initial experiences of mohajirs in Pakistan after the partition, in which the transmission and/or repetition of trauma may be discerned. However, the sharp questioning of the conception of group identity on the basis of religion that underpinned the Muslim League’s ideology indicates the possibility of beginning to work through the memory of the founding trauma, through the articulation of self-criticism in the realist mode.

In the decade after 1947, as Cleary argues, barring disputes over Kashmir, the Indian establishment had largely come to accept the partition as irreversible. However, given the fact that India is a vast multi-ethnic state with regional disparities, anxieties about further struggles with a ‘communal’ basis that might lead to another breakdown of the state or fragmentation of the nation continued to haunt the leaders and the elite. 1947 was thus often evoked as an Ur-trauma that served to remind the people of the catastrophic prospects of future communal conflicts and the secessions that

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., pp. 143–44.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 23. According to LaCapra, such trauma paradoxically become the valorised or intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or group.
Witnessing Partition

might follow. The memory of the partition could thus be deployed to consolidate a potentially fissiparous state.\textsuperscript{113} Early fiction about the partition from India articulates such anxieties about fissiparous tendencies to an extent, foregrounding the need for unity through relationships across community lines, and the loss of a shared culture.\textsuperscript{114} The way in which the memory of the founding trauma was negotiated was thus quite different in the Indian case, given the fear of repetition of violence and further fragmentation.

In the next sections I will analyse two early novelistic representations of the partition from India. Widespread dislocation and historical trauma beyond anything earlier experienced in the Subcontinent led to numbing, amnesia and the pervasive use of the metaphor of madness. In some writings of this phase the impulse to shock the reader into disgust ran amuck, amounting to what Alok Rai has described as a pornography of violence; even well-intentioned writing often failed to capture the scale and qualitatively different nature of the moral catastrophe.\textsuperscript{115} This was especially the case with respect to the blurring of the boundary between victim and perpetrator and violence directed within the community. As we shall see, during this period novelists often fell back on models derived from colonial and nationalist writing on communal violence.

\section*{Love in the Time of Train Massacres}

Khushwant Singh’s \textit{Train to Pakistan} (1954) is perhaps the best known of the early novels in English dealing with the experience of the partition in the Punjab.\textsuperscript{116} Despite the author’s keen interest in the subject of Sikh history, in no way does this novel purport to be

\textsuperscript{113} In contrast to Ireland, see Cleary, \textit{Literature, Partition and the Nation State}, p. 113.

\textsuperscript{114} Alok Bhalla emphasises shared social and cultural practices that were lost during the violence. See Bhalla, Introduction to \textit{Stories}, pp. vii–ix. For an account of the ‘Ganga-Jamuna’ composite culture, as neither excessively Persiанизed nor overly Sanskritised, see ‘Conversation with Kamleshwar’ in S. P. Kumar, \textit{Narrating Partition}, p. 177.

\textsuperscript{115} Rai, ‘The trauma of Independence’, p. 365.

\textsuperscript{116} Khushwant Singh was born in 1915 in Hadali, Punjab. After being educated at Government College, Lahore and at King’s College and the
solely about Sikh identity and the community’s experience of the partition. As Singh himself put it, ‘The Partition theme was born out of a sense of guilt that I had done nothing to save the lives of innocent people and behaved like a coward.’ The novel is set in the village Mano Majra in the frontier areas, inhabited mainly by Sikh and Muslim peasants. The romance-across-the-divide story of village rogue Juggut Singh and Nooran, the Muslim daughter of the blind local mullah, unfolds in the backdrop of looming violence to come. The plot-structure is somewhat thinly constructed and

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The author was also working on a book on the Sikhs while writing the novel. See Singh, ‘Compulsions to Write’ in Dhawan ed. Three Contemporary Novelists, p. 35–36. This was eventually published as a short History of the Sikhs. See Singh, Truth, Love, pp. 151, 188. Singh was to author several books on the subject, including a longer two-volume A History of the Sikhs (1962, 1966).

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118 Singh, ‘Compulsions to Write’, p. 36.

119 The first working title of the novel was Mano Majra. Ibid., p. 37.

120 For a discussion of the romance-across-the-political-divide structure in the case of literature about the Irish and Palestinian experiences of partition, see Cleary, Literature, Partition and the Nation State, pp. 110–19.
has the weaknesses of what LaCapra describes as a redemption narrative.\footnote{In such narratives the possibility of achieving an empathic unsettlement through the use of unusual stylistic effects that may allow for a cognitive as well as affective mapping of historical trauma is lost. See LaCapra, \textit{Writing History}, p. 90.} Such narratives often portray a stereotypical overcoming and reconciliation after the traumatic or limit event.\footnote{Ibid., p. 90.} In my reading, the comforting resolutions of such redemption narratives in the wake of 1947, however well intentioned, contribute to tendencies towards acting out and repetition. In contrast, the unsettling effects of Manto’s stories allow to an extent for recognition of the difficulty of mourning in such a context of silence and denial, as we shall see.

‘The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers.’\footnote{Singh, \textit{Train to Pakistan}, p. 9.} The novel begins with a description of how the delay in the coming of the monsoon leads people to believe that they have been punished for their sins; the specific sins for which they had good reason to feel so are the communal riots that had broken out in Calcutta the previous year. The narrator, though, apportions blame equally. ‘The fact is, both sides killed.’\footnote{Ibid.} A brief account of the escalation in violence follows, with references to killings in Noakhali and Bihar. This leads to panic migrations of Sikh and Hindu communities in these provinces who meet Muslims coming in the opposite direction from the East. Ten million people were in flight by the time the creation of the new state of Pakistan had been announced.\footnote{Jalal shows how in the various battles for social space in the localities of the Punjab in 1947, whether between individuals or involving armed civil militias, it was not so much the overarching category of Hindu, Muslim or Sikh which was most important, given that there were many instances of people saving victims from the other community. Rather, the balance between the individual and the community had shifted in crucial ways during the late 1940s. The RSS and the Muslim League’s National Guard (MLNG) had been militarising civilians in various districts, supplying them with weapons procured from ex-army men who had been demobilised after the war. The RSS had the best-organised militias in the various districts of the Punjab, followed by the MLNG, even as the Sikhs began to later mobilise in turn as the Akal Fauj. In fact the Punjab Ministry had to ban the MLNG and the RSS under Section 16 of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act. See Jalal, \textit{Self and Sovereignty}, pp. 504–10.}
Even so, Mano Majra, a tiny village on the frontier, is depicted by Singh as one of the few oases of peace still left.  

The capsule history preceding the main narrative of *Train to Pakistan* is marred by the use of journalistic clichés; the sense of detail that might otherwise have helped frame the storyline is missing. Khushwant Singh sets the action on the Indian side of the border at a time after the large-scale rioting and violence had begun, conceiving of a utopian space somehow unaffected by much of what had transpired in the cities of the Punjab. Even so, it is the passage of trains through the village that regulates time in Mano Majra, to the extent of marking the hour of prayer for the religious figures, including the mullah at the mosque and the Sikh priest. As Kaul points out, the disruption of ‘clock-time’ marked by the passage of trains, indicating the presence of modernity alongside the diurnal rhythms of agricultural existence, is a key device. There is a perception that partition violence disrupted not only such cyclical patterns of traditional life but also modes of modern existence characterised by linear temporality that coexisted with older rhythms.

Though villagers in general seem to have very little idea of what is happening at the level of national politics, the village sub-inspector reveals much in his conversation with the deputy commissioner and district magistrate, Hukum Chand. The magistrate describes how Sikhs ‘retaliated’ by attacking a Muslim refugee train and sending it across the border with over 1000 corpses with the slogan ‘Gift to Pakistan’ written on the engine. The sub-inspector speaks of Hindus not being the equal of the Muslims in the stabbing

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126 Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, p. 10.
128 Ibid. For an analysis of political processes in the rural areas, and the transformation of the network of *pirs* and *sajjada nashins* into a religious leadership, with its base in rural Punjab, see Gilmartin, ‘Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement in the Punjab’ in Hasan ed. *India’s Partition*, pp. 198–232. This essay’s account of the percolation of religion as ideology into rural Punjab over a period of time may be contrasted to the ‘timeless’ depiction of rural life in this novel. Also see Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 189–233.
129 After the statement by Clement Attlee on 28 February 1947 declaring that power would be transferred by June 1948, the Sikhs faced the fact that many of their important shrines would be in Pakistan. On 3rd March
game, but being a match for them in the case of an open fight. He talks with pride of RSS boys beating up Muslim gangs in all the cities, while the Sikhs had not done their share, having ‘lost their manliness’. Atrocities by mobs in Sheikhupura and Gujranwala, with the alleged assistance of the Pakistan police and army provide the rationale for administrative cynicism when it came to the question of evacuation of Muslims from Mano Majra, especially if more refugees from West Punjab began to pass through the area. Indeed, he says, many of the local Muslims may have heard of Gandhi, but they had probably not heard of Jinnah. Through these characters Singh shows the extent to which the provincial administrative structure and the police force had been infiltrated by the ideology of Hindu communal exclusivism. There is also an illustration of the way rumour could so easily be treated as fact, even as sensational accounts of violence began to circulate widely, legitimising counter-violence and administrative inaction.

The interruption of train schedules is the first sign of trouble, culminating in the discovery of a train full of the dead. The Congress and the Akalis decided to oppose the League, and Master Tara Singh declared that all the proponents of Pakistan should go to the ‘qabristan’. Such reckless speeches triggered violence in the Punjab, even as the Mahasabha took an active part in ensuring that the All India Congress Working Committee put forward its own demand for the partition of the Punjab on 8th March. This led to the all India Majlis-i-Ahrar under Ataullah Shah Bukhari severing ties with the Congress, and a split in its body, as a section joined the Muslim League. See Jalal, Self and Sovereignty, pp. 510–17.

Singh, Train to Pakistan, pp. 28–30. As Pandey points out, acknowledging Veena Das’s insights in this regard, there has been a relative silence in written accounts about male castration (while this has been insinuated in oral accounts) as opposed to instances like the branding and tattooing of women’s bodies, as reported for instance by Begum Anis Kidwai. These latter may have acquired a symbolic significance in male fantasies in a patriarchal culture, in contrast to the need to be silent about male humiliation. See Pandey, Remembering Partition, footnotes 21 and 73.

Singh, Train to Pakistan, pp. 29–30.

For a discussion of the modalities through which violence was incited through rumours during these years, see Pandey, Remembering Partition, pp. 69–74.

The spirit of revenge led to trains being attacked in retaliation for trains filled with bodies coming from East Punjab. Material benefits accrued largely
'ghost train’ enters Mano Majra, and the numerous bodies then have to be disposed of in a large funeral pyre. Hukum Chand, the magistrate, estimates that at least 1500 have died. A massacre like this puts his Hindu philosophy of *karma* into question. With this the evacuation of local Muslims begins, given the fear of retaliation. Lorries from Pakistan take away those who wish to migrate to Pakistan; refugees from West Punjab who stop at the village are fed by the local Muslims. The magistrate seeks to minimise the loss of life in his area by hatching a scheme that would involve both Juggut Singh and Iqbal, the Communist activist of the People’s Party of India who had been arrested by the local police on charges that had no basis. Hukum Chand’s decision is partly prompted by his involvement with Haseena, the underage Muslim prostitute for whom he develops a curious attachment. The anecdote which she shares with him about the *hijras* or eunuchs who are asked to identify themselves as Hindu or Muslim on the basis of whether they were circumcised, and who lift up their garments to display that they are neither, is an instance of Mantoesque black humour. The identification of religious identity on the basis of such ritualised bodily practices is simply not possible in their case.

The segregation of the village along community lines becomes palpable as stories of atrocities against Muslims in the eastern to individuals, not the communities. Such criminal actions were initiated in pursuit of *zar* and *samin* (wealth and property) and *zan* (women) that constituted the elements of material culture in the northwestern territories. Heinous crimes were inflicted upon women; in some cases the Pathans did not spare local Muslims either. See Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, pp. 557–61.

134 Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, pp. 93–100.
135 Ibid., 115–16.
136 For a later witness account of a *hijra* who did survive partition violence on this basis of such a liminal definition of identity, see Verma, *Aftermath*, pp. 151–64. Also see Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, pp. 121–22.
part of Punjab begin to circulate. The Muslims recall stereotypical images of Sikhs as violent, anti-Muslim beings, while the Sikhs recall stereotypes about the Muslims as having no loyalties, as well as the martyrdoms and sacrifices by their ancestors during Muslim rule in India.\textsuperscript{138} The actual process of evacuation is marked by abetment of the actions of the local bandit Malli by Sikh soldiers who supervise this process.\textsuperscript{139} Malli’s band of thugs ensures that property of departing Muslims remain in their hands.\textsuperscript{140} The arrival of the second ‘ghost train’ and the sight of bodies floating down the river Sutlej create a climate of fear and apprehension. A Sikh from the city attempts to incite retaliatory violence by getting the village Sikhs to help him in attacking the train due to pass through the village, despite the fact that some of the passengers are certain to be local Muslims. The description of this young man clad in cowboy-style attire may remind us of Jalal’s and Kamtekar’s accounts of the role played by many demobilised soldiers in the violence.\textsuperscript{141}

Eventually Hukum Chand sets his plan into motion when he acquires intelligence of the likelihood of an attack on the train moving across the border, at a point when there are no Muslims left in the village.\textsuperscript{142} Another character, Iqbal, whose name does not readily reveal his religious identity to the villagers, is a former expatriate who has become an activist on behalf of the Communists. The variant of dialectical materialism he espouses acts as a counterweight to the instrumental rationality of the magistrate, who cynically contrasts the spreading ‘madness’ and his own administrative helplessness with Nehru’s ‘tryst with destiny’ speech.\textsuperscript{143} However, Iqbal too proves to be an armchair intellectual, unable to intervene. The peasant and known ‘badmash’, or hooligan, Juggut Singh visits the Sikh gurudwara before eventually transcending his situation and his reputation. He sacrifices himself to save Nooran as he cuts through

\textsuperscript{138} Singh, \textit{Train to Pakistan}, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{139} As Kaul argues, this emphasises the criminal complicity of administrative systems in making inevitable the movement of minority populations. See Introduction in Kaul ed. \textit{The Partitions of Memory}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{140} Singh, \textit{Train to Pakistan}, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{142} Singh, \textit{Train to Pakistan}, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., p. 201.
the rope that had been strung across the bridge by Malli’s gang to sweep away passengers sitting on the train’s roof.\textsuperscript{144} The ending thus foregrounds the capacity of individuals to act contrary to the logic of murderous dictates masquerading as originating from the community, even while rediscovering the significance of the sacred in the profane.\textsuperscript{145}

Furthermore, it is the two Muslim women from the ajlaf class who in their own respective ways lead to changes in the mindsets of both the magistrate and Juggut Singh. Nooran precipitates the impulse to give the gift of life to a Sikh who had himself earlier been represented as a sexual aggressor, in a society in which masculine aggression is depicted as commonplace and naturalised.\textsuperscript{146} However, gender-based violence of the kind widespread during the partition is not the novel’s main concern. The redemption achieved by the village rogue may rather be read as a flawed attempt to negotiate the shared experience of guilt with respect to the Muslims of East Punjab, who had by then been ‘cleared’ and/or eliminated, except in Malerkotla. Such nostalgia for the simplicities of peasant existence may be a by-product of Singh’s desire to assuage collective guilt as regards the later treatment of Muslims in Punjab.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{144} Singh had begun the novel with the notion of a symbolic framework and the Hindu trinity in mind, with Jagga paralleling Brahma, the creator, Hukum Chand, Vishnu, the creator and Iqbal, Shiva the destroyer. This framework, needless to say, does not work. Cited by Shahane, ‘The Novel as Realistic Epic’, footnotes 15 and 96.

\textsuperscript{145} Jalal underlines the personal and localised nature of the violence and the victimisation of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women by men supposedly seeking to safeguard their community’s interests. The sacred thus turned into the profane in many instances, an insight which comes to the fore, as Jalal suggests, when gender is placed at the centre of the analysis. The personal realm and women’s bodies in particular, earlier deemed sacrosanct even during riots in which men played a predominant role, now became the target for vicious attacks and monstrous reprisals. See Jalal, \textit{Self and Sovereignty}, p. 553.

\textsuperscript{146} Jalal acknowledges that the Sikhs were the most deeply wounded by the implications of the divided Punjab. Ibid., p. 553.

\textsuperscript{147} I concur with Prempati’s criticism of the simple, formulaic nature of the plot and the limitations of the documentary style adopted. See Prempati, ‘\textit{Train to Pakistan}’, pp. 109–14.
As Harjot Oberoi has shown, from the nineteenth century onwards there had been a gradual retreat of the Punjabi elite, especially Sikhs, from the domain of the popular where the shared culture of the Punjab had been shaped during participation in forms of collective worship, such as in the case of the Sakhi Sarwar cult. The plural culture of the Punjab had been affected by the increasing dominance of the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabhas, leading to a homogenisation of religious communities and the purging of religious diversity. The pluralist peasant culture for which the novel expresses nostalgia had been eroded drastically by the 1940s in any case. In the novel, the relationship between Juggut Singh and Nooran is not developed in any detail, nor is his eventual transformation into a figure capable of redemption through self-sacrifice at the altar of love. The sentimental ending offers narrative closure through an implicit invocation of Punjabi folklore and romantic legends about star-crossed lovers such as Heer–Ranjha and Sassi–Pannu. However, as Oberoi argues, such folk songs recited by minstrels across the province also illustrate both the existence of clan rules and the way conflict, retribution and violence followed when the rules were violated. Indeed, Oberoi shows that questions of honour and shame within lineages were often more important than religious loyalties. Such questions are deflected by the narrative, which achieves its resolution through the emphasis on the nobility of Juggut Singh’s romantic sacrifice for his Muslim lover. This may be a way of masking the trauma and sense of guilt that Singh and many others felt at this time.

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148 Many Sikhs worshipped Sakhi Sarwar, a Muslim pir. See the discussion of the popular and syncretic modes of worship and religious practice in the Sikh community, in Oberoi 139–206. For an analysis of the transformation of Sikhism with the expansion of the Singh Sabha movement and consequent distancing of the elite from popular modes, see Oberoi, The Construction, pp. 305–80.

149 Ibid., pp. 120–22.

150 Ibid., p. 419.

151 It is also possible that Singh was aware of the recent tragic death of Boota Singh, a Sikh who married a young Muslim girl whom he had rescued during the riots. He was forcibly separated from her when the repatriation of abducted women began and later committed suicide by throwing himself on a railway track. For a version of this story see Lapierre and Collins, Freedom at Midnight, New Delhi: Vikas, 1977 (rpt 2004), pp. 423–26, 574–78.
Perhaps this projection of utopian desire became the reason for the enduring popularity of the novel, despite its weaknesses and the facile resolution of the problem of representing fractured intercommunity relationships in the wake of 1947. Issues such as the extent of the percolation of religion as ideology in the rural areas of Punjab, as well as the complicity of ordinary people in violence that was not always the result of instigation by ‘outsiders’ and thugs are insufficiently engaged with. Even so, the criticism of the bureaucratic mentality and the foregrounding of the figure of the ajlaf Muslim woman remain of interest, stemming from a variant of earthy and iconoclastic romanticism espoused by Singh. However, the economy of affect mobilised in the novel remains compromised by the recourse to stereotypes and the phoniness of the formulaic ending. Occasional moments of black humour and irony apart, the narrative fails to question the formal resources available for representing catastrophic violence, as Manto’s and Husain’s stories do in different ways. The problems with Singh’s use of a formulaic structure that provides a reassuring closure also highlights the pervasive and traumatic effects of the event on imagination and memory in the immediate aftermath of the partition. The limitations of this narrative as a mode of ‘fictive’ testimony thus need to be contextualised with reference to the historical moment during which few even attempted to engage with the partition in imaginative terms.

The Partition and its Discontents

Ashis Nandy cites Stanley Tambiah’s tacit evocation of Freud’s notion of the ‘narcissism of minor differences’ to explain the hatred of the Other in the South Asian context; the necessity to obliterate the other may paradoxically stem from its sameness with the self; a need to annihilate a ‘difference’ that is part of the self, thus objectifying the other as the ‘total other’. In Nandy’s terms,

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152 In his autobiography, Singh writes of his desire for an Indian Muslim girl when young; he reached the conclusion that all you have to do is fall in love with a person to love his or her community. See Singh, *Truth, Love*, pp. 36–37.

the events of 1947 have written themselves as an unwritten epic that people in South Asia pretend does not exist, but are forced to live by. This ‘tacit epic’ tells of battles, involving not merely valour and sacrifice, but psychopathic violence, sheer pettiness and great betrayal. However, novels written soon after 1947 do not seem to be quite able to capture the rough textures of this ‘unwritten epic’ in the way that a story like Intizar Husain’s ‘An Unwritten Epic’ does (as I show in Chapter Five). This becomes evident as we turn to a novel that makes explicit reference to epic narratives such as the Mahabharata, yet falls back on colonial rhetoric while describing communal violence.

In The Dark Dancer (1958) by Balachandra Rajan the partition becomes the backdrop to a story about fractured personal relationships. The novel’s protagonist is a Tamil Brahmin who returns after completing his studies in England. This is atypical, given that most novels about the Partition focus on an insider’s experience of the sundering of community ties. Southern India, except for the violence in Hyderabad, did not directly undergo the massive upheavals that shook north Indian society. Furthermore, as an returned expatriate, the protagonist Krishnan initially finds himself at odds with the social values of his community; his rediscovery of roots is a partial and flawed journey. The partition becomes a metaphor for existential dislocation in the novel. Recovery of memory of the homeland becomes a tragicomic exercise for Krishnan, as conventional identity markers become unrecognisable. This is partly due to the absurd persistence of the ritualised worldview of religious orthodoxy in the face of irrevocable changes brought about by colonial modernity. I focus here on the use of certain forms of rhetoric in the depiction of communal rioting and the stereotypes of ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the portrayal of representative types of the community, as well as the allegorical

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154 Ibid., pp. 99–100.
155 Balachandra Rajan (1920) is a well-known literary critic. He was educated at Presidency College, Madras and Trinity College, Cambridge. He worked as a diplomat before migrating to Canada, where he became a Professor of literature. Rajan has published several books on Milton, T. S. Eliot and Yeats, amongst others. He was the founder and editor of Focus. Rajan has also written another novel about India, Too Long in the West (London, 1960; New York 1961). See biographical note in Balachandra Rajan, The Dark Dancer. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1958 (rpt 1970).
framework underpinning the narrative. A panorama of violence and revenge unfolds before the protagonist, almost as if a spectacle of self-destruction to which Krishnan becomes witness. However, the narrative is marred by an insufficient engagement with collective suffering and near-solipsistic preoccupation with the protagonist’s desire for personal freedom.

Krishnan returns to India after studying for ten years in England. Given his exposure to western individualism and ideas about free choice in personal relationships, he is not able to readily accept his family’s plan for an arranged marriage. Krishnan eventually accepts one of the several proposals that come his way and Kamala, a quiet person with spiritual qualities that are gradually revealed, becomes his wife.\(^{156}\)

Krishnan’s subsequent decision to teach in a college is short-lived, given the low level of respect accorded to teachers in Indian society.\(^{157}\) He joins the civil service and comes to terms with the irony of being part of a bureaucratic system that he had once condemned. In the months leading up to independence he becomes a file pusher, even as events on the national scene drift steadily towards disaster.\(^{158}\) Krishnan is aware, nevertheless, of the significance of the statistical data contained in the files as the apportioning of assets to India and Pakistan begins.\(^{159}\) A conversation with his colleague Pratap Singh gives the first hint of the trouble to come. ‘It seemed the end then, it seemed impossible that insanity could go further. Now it’s starting again. Last year was only the prelude’.\(^{160}\) Krishnan was aware of ‘the core of desperation, the violent flood beneath the disciplined surface’, but can only suggest that Pratap Singh focus on his work rather than on the tragedy unfolding before them.\(^{161}\)

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\(^{156}\) Rajan, *Dark Dancer*, p. 20.

\(^{157}\) Ibid., p. 54.

\(^{158}\) Ibid., pp. 56–58.


\(^{160}\) Rajan, *Dark Dancer*, p. 77.

\(^{161}\) Ibid. The narrative does not make extensive use of political history, except insofar as to frame the narrative in a way reminiscent of early nationalist histories such as G. D. Khosla’s *Stern Reckoning* (1949). See Khosla, *Stern Reckoning: A Survey of the Events leading up to and following the Partition of India* in Hasan ed. *The Partition Omnibus*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1949 (rpt 2002).
However, such a strategy of compartmentalisation, a feature of bureaucratic thinking and procedures, seems to break down in the face of personal tragedies.

Such references to violence as ‘temporary madness’ had a long prehistory in the colonial archive, appearing in countless bureaucratic reports about Hindu–Muslim violence. Deepak Mehta shows that the communal riot was often placed in an epidemiological framework, in which ‘outbreaks’ of violence were to be contained by the civil administration, with special punitive measures directed at ‘contagion’ spread by agitators from the criminal class. This threat could be extended to immigrants to the city as well. Even in nationalist reporting on the riot, as in the case of a Congress Bulletin cited by Mehta, the riot is a ‘plague’, a ‘temporary madness’ propelled by its agent, the hooligan. The riot becomes a public spectacle in such accounts, a disease staged publicly that demands the intervention of the state. Rajan’s narrative seems to follow such descriptive models; at this point the protagonist is indeed a representative of the state.

A further illustration of the pervasiveness of the rhetoric of ‘us’ and ‘them’ appears during a social gathering at Krishnan’s house when Pratap Singh tries to blame Imtiaz, another Muslim colleague, for the division of the country and the violence that had broken out. The group listens to the speeches on All India Radio by Lord Mountbatten, Nehru for the Congress, Jinnah for the Muslim League and Baldev Singh for the Akalis, which announce the partition to come. Imtiaz defends his patriotic credentials but the mood turns ugly and fissures become clearly visible, as Pratap Singh demands that Muslims prove their loyalty. Kamala’s response is that we need to trust ‘them’ as well. Increased acrimony in the personal sphere mirrors to an extent the disagreements and hostility on display in the transfer of power negotiations after the breakdown of discussions of the Cabinet Mission plan. The aggressive Sikh’s demeanour and rhetoric of blame is contrasted with Kamala’s even-handed and calm disposition as she seems to be able to transcend the bad passions whipped up in this moment of jubilation as well as bitterness and despair.

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163 Ibid.
164 See Rajan, Dark Dancer, pp. 113–15. The episode may remind us again of Freud’s concept of the narcissism of minor differences, wherein
His accidental meeting in Delhi with Cynthia, an English friend of part Indian descent from his student days in England, (with whom he then falls in love) exacerbates the sense of conflict in Krishnan’s mind. He begins a short-lived affair with Cynthia, during which he rejects Kamala. Her quiet and dignified response to this forces him to reflect in greater depth on the consequences of such intense but transitory passion. Krishnan fails to come to terms with Cynthia’s individuality and her requirement of complete involvement and commitment in a relationship. The Radcliffe Award demarcating boundary lines sharpens this sense of difference, reminding them of the divisions colonial history brought in its wake. A visit to Mathura during which Krishnan realises Cynthia’s inability to participate in Hindu ritual and her alienness to his faith precipitates the final break with her. This falling back on conservative aspects of tradition is somewhat unconvincing, given Krishnan’s earlier espousal of modern ideas.

Prior to this, after a visit to the north and west, Cynthia recalls the fratricidal war described in the *Mahabharata* and anticipates a similar war of inheritance to come. Krishnan defends the independence struggle and the application of non-violence to the communities living in adjoining territories or related to one another may engage in constant feuds and ridicule one another, a relatively harmless form of venting aggression. See Freud, ‘Civilization and its Discontents’ in *Civilization, Society and Religion*, New Delhi: Shrijee’s Books, 1929 (rpt 2003), pp. 318–19. In a given historical conjuncture, with the spread of fear and paranoia, ‘minor’ differences could be activated in the form of belligerence and violence. I am indebted to Alok Rai for drawing my attention to this idea.

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166 Ibid., pp. 145–78.
167 Ibid., p. 127. For a more nuanced use of this concept, see Francisco’s notion of nationalist fratricide in his review essay on Partition stories. In his view this would entail a conflict between people of a common cultural heritage, usually subjects of foreign domination, in competition as ‘nations’ for political control of land and government, in contrast with nationalist genocide, in which state sponsored persecution and killing of minorities takes place. See Jason Francisco, ‘In the Heat of Fratricide: The Literature of India’s Partition Burning Freshly’ in Hasan ed. *Inventing Boundaries*, p. 372. We may contrast this rather simplistic invocation of the *Mahabharata* with Nandy’s earlier cited reference to the ‘epic’ dimensions of partition violence. In Nandy’s terms such an unwritten epic dissolves...
struggle for thirty years. In response, Cynthia criticises Indians as being a resigned rather than a pacific people, accepting decisions made by others for them, whether the family, or tradition, or the government. Her view is that non-violence is easier when it is obvious that nothing else will work and when it fits the natural forces of resignation. For Cynthia, a relentless engine of conformity is like an engine without a safety valve, with the potential to run amuck.\textsuperscript{168} There are colonialist/Orientalist overtones to this analysis, which has more pertinence to their own failed relationship.\textsuperscript{169} This point of view is unacceptable to Krishnan as he rejects her diagnosis of the Indian condition. Rajan’s description of the widespread violence after the division of the subcontinent, even as words and inflamed reports as well as provocative rumours became like bacteria in the air that ‘seized you like contagion’, follows the aforementioned rhetoric of governmental reports.\textsuperscript{170} After the first wave of arson and killings, with Delhi on fire, began the exodus of people displaced in what seemed to be history’s ‘greatest tide of suffering’.\textsuperscript{171}

Meanwhile, his wife Kamala accepts the humiliation his actions bring her way and, rather than confront him, chooses to go and work with refugees at a camp at Shantihpur. Feeling an acute sense of regret at his behaviour after breaking with Cynthia, Krishnan

\textsuperscript{168} Rajan, \textit{Dark Dancer}, p. 29 of the text.

\textsuperscript{169} The classic study of Orientalist structures remains Said’s \textit{Orientalism}. Here there is self-consciousness about such ideas being articulated by a woman with some Indian blood in her veins, an in-between figure to an extent. Such views were often expressed in the community of Anglo-Indians or domiciled Europeans in India. In contrast, for a recent study of the experience of a domiciled European who was an officer in the Gurkha Rifles assigned to protect refugees during the partition riots, and who felt a strong sense of guilt about his failure to do more to avert the killings, see Nixon and Ghosh ‘Fire in the Kangra: A British Soldier’s Story of Partition’ in Gera Roy and Bhatia eds. \textit{Partitioned Lives}, pp. 174–91.

\textsuperscript{170} Rajan, \textit{Dark Dancer}, p. 161. For a description of the role of rumour in primary as well as secondary historical accounts, see Pandey, \textit{Remembering Partition}, pp. 69–84.

pursues her there. The train in which Krishnan travels is packed with refugees. While trying to find space to stand, he has a strange encounter with a man hiding in a toilet, a Muslim disguised as a Brahmin. The life or death situation that ensues is portrayed with an element of absurdity. However, the stereotypical ideas about being a Muslim or being a Brahmin that the two individuals trapped in the toilet rely on to gauge one another’s potential for violence seem only to replicate the discourses of communal identity that had become activated and hardened in the surcharged situation of the times. Furthermore, the reliance on stereotypes denies us any sense of interiority as regards the Muslim character’s state of mind.

During the later raid on the train by Sikhs keen on vengeance, in which the Muslim is eventually killed, a Sikh speaks of the need for psychological solace through retaliatory vengeance. The aggressive Sikh who ‘rescues’ Krishnan thus rationalises his bloody deeds on account of the losses he had himself suffered. He mocks Krishnan and his alleged South Indian passivity, a further instance of the ethnic and religious typologies that were in play at the time.

Vengeance is represented as intrinsic to the behavioural patterns of martial races, here exemplified by the Muslim and Sikh. The situational irony that arises as a result of Krishnan’s witnessing of this confrontation is somewhat limited in scope, as the killing of the Muslim becomes the pretext for commonplace psychologising. Instead of the recourse to searching irony that might have unsettled the stereotype, as in Manto’s stories, the martial types bear out the cultural weight ascribed to them. Krishnan witnesses the spectacle of violent death with a certain detachment as death is brutally visited on the Muslim in disguise instead of him. Here the sense of violence becoming a spectacle is accentuated; as passive bystander,

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172 Ibid., pp. 181–278.
174 Ibid., pp. 200–8. For example, as Partha Chatterjee has shown in another context, Ambedkar’s essay on *Pakistan or the Partition of India* is sharply critical of procedures of colonial governance relying on such typologies, especially the use of the theory of martial races that contributed to the communal composition of the army. Indeed, sixty per cent were recruited from the Punjab, Northwest Frontier and Kashmir, of which more than half were Muslim. Cited in P. Chatterjee, ‘The Nation in Heterogenous Time’, pp. 52–53.
Witnessing Partition

Krishnan becomes a voyeur rather than responsible witness. The voyeuristic stance on display here is notable in relation to many aspects of the Indian situation for the returned expatriate. We may also infer a degree of psychic numbing resulting from this experience.

The sections of the novel set in Shantihpur do convey to an extent the misery, desperation and degradation that followed large-scale migration and feeble attempts by the newly formed nation states to extend some help in the form of relief camps. The exchanges between Krishnan and the beleaguered medical officer who tries to do his duty amidst circumstances that outweigh his limited resources are marked by caustic wit and a sense of irony.\textsuperscript{175}

The discovery of Muslim refugees suffering from cholera precipitates rioting within the camp. As carriers of contagion, they seem to embody the images constructed in discourses on rioting.\textsuperscript{176}

Despite the efforts of the medical officer, Kamala, and Krishnan, these patients die of disease or are murdered.\textsuperscript{177} The metaphor of contagion acquires a literal and concrete form as fear of the spread of cholera causes the Hindu mob to gather outside the camp hospital.\textsuperscript{178} Despite squaring down the mob with help from Krishnan, who empties the bullets from his gun, the medical officer is unable to save the lives of the patients in his charge.\textsuperscript{179} Further mob violence occurs in the camp and Kamala sacrifices her own life to save a Muslim girl’s life and honour.\textsuperscript{180} Her acceptance of Krishnan prior to this following his repentance and remorse is presented as an aspect of her identity as a Hindu, Tamil Brahmin wife. The absence of recrimination and the calm with which Kamala resumes the rhythms of married life with him in the constrained


\textsuperscript{176} A discussion with Alok Rai helped clarify this point.

\textsuperscript{177} As Deepak Mehta shows, in the colonial archive, riots were often conflated with disease and described in such terms. See Mehta, ‘Documents and Testimony’, pp. 259–98.

\textsuperscript{178} Rajan seems to draw here on Freud’s observation that fearamounting to panic can increase enormously in groups, often disproportionately to the real danger, through induction or contagion. See Freud, ‘Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego’ in \textit{Civilization, Society and Religion}, pp. 126–27.


\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., pp. 276–80.
circumstances of the camp marks her as a rather idealised figure.\textsuperscript{181} Her death does achieve the goal she set for herself, but her sacrifice does not stem the tide of violence in the camp, quite unlike the ending of \textit{Train to Pakistan}. Instead, her killers are immediately set upon by a mob angered by her death, given the respect they had for her. The Medical Officer later rues this irony, insofar as this was quite the antithesis of what she might have sought if she had lived.\textsuperscript{182}

The mythological allusion in the title to Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, is rendered ironic, as bleak, meaningless episodes of violence recur, unlikely to be followed by any regenerative possibilities. Indeed, Krishnan’s friend Vijayaraghavan questions the very basis for detachment, as articulated in the \textit{Gita}. ‘Only when I look at her death the \textit{Gita} no longer makes sense’.\textsuperscript{183} In Krishnan’s final recollection of the \textit{Gita} — of Krishna’s words to Arjuna on the battlefield — a resolution in metaphysical terms is attempted. Krishnan seeks to achieve a more profound understanding of non-violence and its cultural roots through Kamala’s sacrifice amidst carnage and barbarity, only to find his parents trying yet again to persuade him to accept another suitable bride.\textsuperscript{184} This tragicomic juxtaposition of the transcendental and the mundane appears as a kind of negative epiphany, leaving Krishnan with a lingering sense of guilt. At the end, we find him walking back ‘to find the strength of his beginning’.\textsuperscript{185}

\textit{The Dark Dancer} seems to enact the multiple fissures brought about by the partition in fictional form, invoking traditional cosmologies and the symbolic language of the epic, which ultimately seem inadequate to apprehend the event. Rajan’s attempt to develop an allegorical framework, in a move away from descriptive realism, has its limitations as well. Krishnan’s personal affairs are marred by lack of self-understanding, mistrust and betrayal, paralleling the suspicion and bad faith between the major religious communities leading up to the partition, with Cynthia (from England) acting as the

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., pp. 213–14.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., p. 285.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., p. 311.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., pp. 306–12.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., p. 313.
catalyst for the breakdown of the marriage. The correspondence works only up to a point, however. For while his location as a privileged returned expatriate initially allows Krishnan the posture of detachment, his stance of self-exile and cynical disillusionment determines the outcome of his failed relationships. At the end after Kamala’s death he comes to a different understanding of the meaning of detachment. Krishnan perceives the meaning of loss and death at a personal level leading, if not to redemption, to a greater degree of self-realisation. However, the negotiation of collective suffering during the partition is flawed by the tendency to view violence as a spectacle and the uncritical replication of colonial rhetoric on riots.

Although the novel does not quite attempt a reassuring tale about the ability of the human spirit to withstand adversity, there is a propensity to represent partition violence in hyperbolic form as an outbreak of accumulated repression at a collective level, violently acted out by characters who are depicted as racial/sectarian/communal types. The patterns of violence are seemingly doomed to recur in this view, in a cycle of destructive and self-destructive violence. Furthermore, the narrative seems to derive its explanatory scheme for historical change from the paradigms of aberration and madness that were often deployed in early nationalist historiography. The possibility of working through trauma is further attenuated due to the tendency to fall back on such hegemonic master-narratives about the partition.

It becomes evident from the discussion above that the complex and multi-causal prehistory of the partition led to a turn amongst

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186 The allusions to Krishnan’s background may include a veiled reference to the fact that so many of the nationalist leaders were educated in England. The story of Nehru’s affair with Edwina Mountbatten was well-known. Khushwant Singh offers a colourful version of this relationship, based on his experience while working as a public relations officer in London after Independence. See Singh, Truth, Love, pp.134–38. However, according to another account, Lapierre and Collins could find no evidence that this affair was anything other than Platonic. See Freedom at Midnight, Preface to 1997 edition, p. xv.

187 LaCapra, Writing History, pp. 41–42.

188 An example of this may be found in the use of images of monstrosity, bestiality and madness in Khosla, Stern Reckoning, especially pp. 2–3.
writers to local and regional contexts, as if to recover memory of ways of life perceived as under threat, almost as a mode of fragmentary resistance. Ahmed Ali’s novel in particular, though written in the late 1930s, looks back to Delhi of the 1920s and before that to 1857, poeticising the experience of loss. Later, the post-partition novels give a sense of the ways in which violence turned within, unleashing demons within the self. On occasion we also find an affirmation of dominant notions of religious community, whether Muslim, Sikh or Hindu and the need to ‘represent’ the community through the reinforcement of community boundaries, this move often indebted in turn to journalistic reporting and the clichés of ‘official’ nationalist histories. Mastur’s narrative about betrayed nationalist ideals and the situation of divided families on both sides of the border, in contrast, undercuts identitarian self-definitions. Her novel enables a questioning of the certitudes of unitary nationalism in Pakistan, beyond the predictable triumphalism with which Shah Nawaz’s novel ends.

Singh’s formulaic redemption narrative and Rajan’s allegorical novel, striving for a panoramic view of the state of the nation, are each marrered by the tendency to fall back on trite psychologisms and reductive types. The failings of these novels as instances of testimony indicate a resistance to the working through of the founding trauma and an undigested relaying of raw experience. The narrative machinery developed by these writers is overly influenced by the rhetoric of the times, whether colonial reporting on riots, or the nationalist rhetoric of blame. Instances of irony and

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189 On the question of rereading colonialist and nationalist historiography from the perspective of fragmentary resistances, Partha Chatterjee is incisive. See P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993 (rpt 1997), especially ch. 1, pp. 3–13. On the fragment as a mode of contesting dominant tendencies to homogenise the nation’s history and politics, see Pandey, ‘In Defense of the Fragment’ in *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006, pp. 16–44. Of course, such fragmentary resistance works differently and in sometimes problematic ways in literary representations; as we shall see in Chapter Five, it is the minimalist mode of the short story that may most effectively counter such ideological pressures. Also, on the concept of memory as counter-history, see Introduction in Radstone ed. *Memory and Methodology*, pp. 11–12.
black humour, nevertheless, allow for an occasional double-take on memories of the fractured civilisational heritage, a theme to be further developed in subsequent chapters.

Novelistic representations of the 1940s and 50s, nonetheless, brought to light to an extent subterranean aspects of social and political discourses leading up to the partition that official histories of the event were mostly silent about. After 1947, the conventions of narrative realism would be further stretched and modified by different writers to encompass both the prehistory of the limit event and the monstrous occurrences of 1946–47, often indicating in self-conscious terms the near-impossibility of representing the opaque core of historical trauma in all its differentiated specificity. The important testimonial writing of Manto and Intizar Husain in the same period further complicates our understanding of the traumatic after-effects of the partition through their complex refrac-
tions of this experience, as I will show in Chapter Five.
Chapter 3

Partition’s Afterlife: Perspectives from the 1960s and 70s

This chapter focuses on novels of the 1960s and 70s that primarily engage with the legacy of the partition through the lens of memory. Rather than representing the experience of widespread massacres and dislocation in the realist mode, writers sought to evolve new representational techniques, as they came to terms with the afterlife of the partition in the two nation states, which in 1971 became three with the formation of Bangladesh. The resistance to working through the memory of the founding trauma mentioned in the previous chapter gave way in such writing to a more nuanced negotiation of individual as well as collective memory, not always predicated on identity politics.¹ The residue of historical trauma continued to circulate, nonetheless, often taking disembodied forms.² Indeed, the possibility of repetition of nightmares of the past continued to haunt the imagination of many writers. The persistence of a form of post-memory amongst writers of the second generation after the partition may be noted as well, as memories of reciprocal violence shaped the consciousness of survivor communities across north India.³

¹ For an elaboration of this idea, see LaCapra, *Writing History*, p. 23.
² The evidence for this was often to be found in caricatures and inflammatory rhetoric that circulated in the phase of tension preceding later instances of communal/secular violence, such as the reference to Muslim-dominated areas as ‘little Pakistan’. Here the stereotype of the other became, as Deepak Mehta argues, a symptom of frozen time; placing the ‘other’ in the predetermined identity-bracket corroded the variegated reality of minority existence in everyday life. See Mehta, ‘Writing the Riot’, pp. 232–33.
³ For an account of post-memory, a form of trauma that persists in the generation following that of the survivors of a catastrophic event, see Hirsch, *Family Frames*, pp. 22–23.
Several critics have highlighted the differences between early responses to the partition during the first decade after 1947 and later representations of the event. Aijaz Ahmad suggests that later writing in Urdu tends to be more reflective, seeking to negotiate larger civilisational, social or political questions after the initial raw narratives of suffering. Alok Bhalla distinguishes between early writing that sought to bear witness, often in the form of terrifying chronicles of the damned, and later writing that was concerned with

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4 Ahmad cites the cases of Ramanand Sagar’s *Aur Insan Mar Gaya* (1948 trans.1987–88, *And Humanity Died*) and Krishan Chander’s *Ghaddar* (1960 lit. *Traitor*) as raw narratives, written in a naturalistic manner to preserve the memory of the brute facts and the attendant ethical collapse. For Ahmad, the most influential of the later Urdu novels was Qurrutulain Hyder’s *Aag ka Darya*. Hyder’s novel was written in 1959 and ‘transcreated’ by the author into English as *River of Fire* in 1998. According to Ahmad this quasi-historical narrative attempted to tell the tale of a primordial composite culture culminating in the partition, and the ennui of divided loyalties for the Muslim migrant, especially of the leisured class. See Aijaz Ahmad, ‘Some Reflections’, p. 27. As Niaz Zaman points out, in this novel Hyder instead of describing the events of 1947 includes a chapter with two words ‘Hindostan: 1947’ (this does not appear in the English translation). See Zaman, *A Divided Legacy*, p. 14. This refusal to describe the violence during this crucial year in independent India’s history may be contrasted to the wide-ranging sweep of this historical novel that seeks to reconstruct the narrative of Indian civilisation as a stream reaching back to Buddhist times and moving forward through currents of change up to the mid-twentieth century. The silence about the events of 1947 is significant, nonetheless, given Hyder’s larger concerns about intercommunity relationships and her own complicated personal history, especially her decision to return from Pakistan (where the novel was written) after having first migrated there. This is not to say that such a technique might always be successful; indeed, one might argue that such a narrative strategy evades the responsibility of narrativising the historical experience of the victims of 1947. For a different and more extensive reading of the different versions of the novel, see Kumkum Sangari’s recent essay, where she argues that the reason for less space being accorded to the atrocity and grief of the partition may be because ‘partition’ lives within the nation and still needs to be distanced, while ‘civilization’ still has to be reclaimed. See Kumkum Sangari, ‘The Configural Mode: *Aag ka Darya*’ in Kathryn Hansen and David Lelyveld eds. *A Wilderness of Possibilities: Urdu Studies in Transnational Perspective*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, especially pp. 42–43.
the fate of the survivors. As Bhalla argues, later writers such as Bhisham Sahni and Rahi Masoom Raza recollected with nostalgia the earlier days in small communities when they shared with each other a secret life that flowed through time, even as political leaders and religious priests waged battles on their behalf. In Bhalla’s terms, later writing also ‘made the troubled attempt to find out whether after such suffering it might be possible for survivors to cease to dwell in grief and learn to live in kinder ways, to accept the fact of being marked by violence yet resist the temptation to retaliate, to mourn for those killed, yet urge forgiveness’. Similarly, Priya Kumar argues that early fiction became a form of testimonial literature, as cited earlier. Kumar raises important questions as regards the extent to which traumatic memories may be passed on across generations, resisting closure through their very replication, as well as the possibility of imagining alternative forms of testifying that may allow inhabitants of other times and spaces to bear witness to a traumatic history through conscious acts of remembering the past.

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7 Kumar refers to the work of Manto in particular (as does Bhalla). See P. Kumar ‘Testimonies’, pp. 202–3; also see her recent discussion of partition stories in *Limiting Secularism*, pp. 123–76.
8 See Priya Kumar, ‘Testimonies’, pp. 202–3. She analyses disparate texts which foreground the possibility of agency and resistance to later instances of communalism and violence with insight. However, Kumar does not at times adequately historicise the modes of witness exemplified by these texts. While Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, a novel written in 1988, Qurrutulain Hyder’s *Sita Haran* (trans. *Sita Betrayed*), a novella written in 1960 and Shyam Benegal’s *Mammo*, a film made in 1995, are indeed ‘testimonies of loss and memory’ (P. Kumar, ‘Testimonies’, pp. 201–3), a fuller account of the moment of production of the texts in question seems necessary. For example, Ghosh refers to witnessing the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom, which set him thinking about childhood memories of riots that occurred after the disappearance of the relic of the Prophet’s hair from the Hazratbal mosque in 1963 (portrayed in *The Shadow Lines*). Given the difficulty of writing about 1984, Ghosh deliberately chose to write about an earlier episode of communal violence. See Ghosh’s essay, ‘The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi’ in Tarun Saint ed. *Bruised Memories*, p. 49.
The imperative to bear primary witness to the event was no longer the primary motivation for many of the writers of this period, due to temporal distance from the event as well as the fraught nature of remembrance for the generation of survivors, whether refugees in India and Pakistan or Indian Muslims. Nevertheless, the peculiar difficulties of engaging with silences and taboos relating to the partition in both India and Pakistan necessitated a reinvention of the witness sensibility, especially in the context of contemporary communal and sectarian violence. As Cathy Caruth has argued with respect to traumatic events, the event may not be assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. Indeed, to be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. This may be the case even with regard to forms of violence that may not be apparent or easily visible but whose effects may be inscribed in the bodies and memories of people who have lived through the event. There were special difficulties in the case of the victims of violence of different kinds and degrees of intensity during the partition of the subcontinent, the traumatic memory of which remained dormant in many instances. In the absence of widespread societal engagement that might have facilitated processes of working through memories of traumatic occurrences, literary writings at times became a mode of surrogate testimony. Responding to the prevalence of the ‘time of partition’, significant testimonial narratives probed the ambiguities of the event and its layered pre-history in oblique ways.

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9 Caruth, Introduction to *Trauma*, pp. 4–5.
11 Bahri refers to the prohibition on direct testimony in cases where the honour of women and families was sullied, leading to a situation of acknowledgement of wrongs but to little public testimony or healing communication. See Deepika Bahri, ‘Telling Tales: Women and the Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*, *Interventions: International Journal of Post-colonial Studies* 1, 2 (1999): 219.
12 Cleary points out with reference to the situation in Northern Ireland that various modes of censorship, including self-censorship, generated elaborate circumlocutions that often signalled positions on the partition question, even when they appeared to side-step the controversial question altogether. See Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation State*, p. 97. In the context of heightened nationalist ‘sensitivities’, writers in South Asia often adopted similar strategies, as I argue in this chapter.
Writers of the 1960s and 70s imaginatively reinterpreted the pre-history of the partition, not necessarily to look for causes as historians might, but rather to explore alternative trajectories that may have led to a different present and future. In the process, several novelists took up larger questions regarding the Indian civilisational experience and the survival of the Indo-Islamic cultural amalgam. One of the major reasons for this in India was the ideological pressure exerted by the Hindu right to further reinforce boundaries between communities, even though this agenda was downplayed initially after Gandhi’s death, and during the phase of Nehruvian secularism. In Pakistan, tensions between Urdu speakers and Bengali speakers eventually culminated in a second partition in 1971 as linguistic identity took precedence over religious identity. During this period important novels explored the memory of spaces of intercommunity dialogue, especially in the domain of the popular, and searched for the reasons for the breakdown of possibilities of exchange. In contrast, barring stray (and problematic) examples such as Khosla’s *Stern Reckoning*, there were few serious attempts by nationalist historians initially to come to terms with the extent of loss experienced by millions of refugees.13

Furthermore, the failure of nationalist histories to address the ambivalent legacy of the partition led writers to explore the root causes of the deteriorating communal/sectarian situation in terms of a longer time-span and durational history than earlier writers. Rather than describing the rioting and communal violence in realist terms, or mirroring social reality as in the case of the dominant stream of the Progressive writers, there was an attempt to capture

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13 As Kamtekar argues in an essay on the ‘fables’ of nationalism, an emphasis on successful decolonisation and the freedom struggle led to a whitewashing of the failures of the independence movement (which was crushed, for instance, in 1942). Consequently there has been a lack of emphasis on continuities between the British system of rule and the post-colonial nation–state, while the trauma of victims of the partition has been underplayed. See Kamtekar, ‘The Fables of Nationalism’, *India International Centre Quarterly* 26, 3 (1999): 44–54.
the long-term effects of historical trauma. Significant narratives included reflections on the ‘grey zone’, the ambiguous cases of victims turning perpetrators. This was often achieved through the subtle interweaving of private and public realms and the creation of metaphors of sundering and division that resonate in different ways, indicating by inference the possibility of recuperation. These novels thus engage in different ways with questions of memory and identity construction in the wake of the violence and traumatic dislocation of the years 1946–47 and its aftermath. This was also a response to the propensity of communities on both sides of the border to selectively memorialise aspects of the past during the phase of nation building.

A selection of the major novels is discussed in this chapter, indicating a range of formal innovations as new modes of literary witnessing were devised. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hosain combines poetic reflection with a realist account of historical processes of the 1930s–40s. *Udas Naslein* (1963 trans. *The Weary Generations* 1999) by Abdullah Hussein is a novel in the critical realist mode that looks further back to the nineteenth century, tracking growing fissures in society as well as in personal relationships right up to the moment of the partition. *Tamas* (1974 trans. 2001) by Bhisham Sahni through its episodic style and psychological realism achieves a critical account of the uncanny manifestations of violence of near-genocidal intensity. Intizar Husain’s *Basti* (1979 trans. 1999), an allegorical meditation on separation, loss and exile, reflects upon the devastation to Pakistani society during

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14 In an early discussion of the Progressive aesthetic and ideology, Memon points out that several contributors to the Lahore journal *Savera* were unable to accept the reality of Pakistan even after the partition and continued to lament the breakdown of communal harmony. Surprisingly, a special issue of the magazine was devoted to Gandhi after his assassination, while no such issue followed Jinnah’s death. See Memon, ‘Partition Literature’, pp. 381–97. Some of Memon’s ideas are further elaborated upon later in Chapter Five. For a more recent defence of the Progressive writers, see Gopal, *Literary Radicalism* especially Introduction, pp. 1–12.

1971 as well as haunting memories of migration after collective violence during the partition. Rahi Masoom Raza’s style is realistic as well, leavened with a vernacular flavour. His novel *Adha Gaon* (1966 trans. *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli/Half a Village* 1994) articulates the predicament of Muslims in rural India, unconvincing by the propagandists of the proponents of the Pakistan movement, also depicting the effects of communal violence on multiple co-existing modes of temporality, while *Topi Shukla* (1968 trans. 2005) captures the vulnerability of those who desired to live in in-between spaces. However, I argue that such efforts were paralleled by the continuation of modes of writing that replicated stereotypes and clichés, at times in more sophisticated ways in recent writing. The prevalence of masculinist anxieties and sexual stereotypes in *The Distant Drum* (1960) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) by Manohar Malgonkar and *Azadi* (1975) by Chaman Nahal indicates the difficulty of freeing the literary imagination from the traps of dominant ideologies of nationalism and/or communalism/sectarianism.

**Historiography of Nationalism in India and Pakistan**

Official histories in India and Pakistan often tended to provide simplistic explanations of the partition, which aimed at reshaping public perceptions of the founding moment of each nation state, as we have seen. According to Gyanendra Pandey, it has been difficult for historians to represent partition violence, which tended to be downplayed in accounts of the freedom struggle in India. In Pakistan a process of stereotyping the role of the ‘Hindu-dominated’ Congress party led to a simplified picture blaming the Congress for not accepting legitimate Muslim demands, thus leading to the inevitability of separation and the formation of Pakistan. Furthermore, in the context of Indian political history, Pratap Bhanu Mehta suggests that the political importance of Hindu nationalism is not of recent vintage. As he argues, the question of adequate representation based on religious identities was never solved, despite protracted

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negotiations and proposals that ranged from separate electorates to Hindu-Muslim parity at the centre to grouping of provinces based on religious majorities. The conundrum of representation was not solved, he suggests, because of a structural dilemma, not merely due to Jinnah’s desire to be the ‘sole spokesman’. If representation was granted purely on a numerical basis, the Muslims feared that they would not have adequate protection for their interests in a Hindu majority country. However, any departure to compensate for this vulnerability invited the charge of denying Hindus their legitimate rights. The later emergence of organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha lent a potent force to such charges.\(^\text{17}\)

In Bhalla’s account, early nationalist histories tended to be teleological narratives which gave the past ‘a retrospective intelligibility and rationality’, in Bhalla’s invocation of Ricoeur’s terms.\(^\text{18}\) As Bhalla argues, supporters of the two-nation theory emphasize Muslim apprehensions of Hindu domination and intolerance, while their opponents highlight Muslim collaboration with the British and supposed treachery on their part. Each draws on a limited repertoire, while ‘neither attempts to understand how society conducted its business of “world-making” before the partition’.\(^\text{19}\)

In a fascinating comparative discussion of nationalist historiography in India and Pakistan, Rajeev Bhargava discerns a strong emotional component in early Indian nationalist historiography. This, he argues, forestalled the possibility of coming to terms with the different principles, as well as element of self-interest that may have led to the demands of the Muslim League being phrased in a certain way at the time.\(^\text{20}\) Such emotionalism may have indeed been at the core of major disagreements that led to the eventual parting of ways and may have influenced the perceptions of historians of the first generation after independence in both countries. As Bhargava argues, in the 1920s when the Muslim League and the Congress cooperated with each other, it was not uncommon for members of


\(^{18}\) Bhalla, ‘Memory and History’, p. 3120.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) The following paragraph draws on Bhargava’s discussion. See Bhargava, ‘History, Nation’, pp. 193–200.
the League to be members of the Indian National Congress. However, by the late 1930s, the two parties had become irrevocably estranged from one another. Bhargava contrasts two different kinds of explanation for this changed situation. First in the official Pakistani view, Hindus and Muslims constituted two separate nations. According to this, the division of British India into Pakistan and Hindustan was legitimate, given that every nation must have a state. The second view, the official stance of the Indian Congress party, did not question the assumption that nations must turn into states, but denied that the Hindus and Muslims were distinct nations. On this ground alone it maintained its principled opposition to the partition. Bhargava argues that a failure of political imagination led to an inability to devise the possibility of an institutional design that could accommodate distinct cultural communities. Nationalist history, he argues, inspired by a sentimental idea of national unity, replicates this failure on both sides of the border.21

Bhargava cites the case of an important essay written in 1944 by Beni Prasad that disputes the use of the term ‘nation’ for a religious group like the Muslims and argues for the depoliticisation of the concept of nationality through the dissociation of statehood and nationhood. In another instance of later reflection on the question of whether a multicultural society might have been sustained without division, he refers to an essay written two decades after the event by the Pakistani historian I. H. Qureishi, who wonders if the two communities possessed the requisite sophistication to be able to maintain a multicultural state. Bhargava provides a third instance of a critical essay by Indian historian R. C. Majumdar who raises the question of the failure of the political parties to conceive how it might be possible for two distinct units to live together as members of a single state. Majumdar goes on to argue that a frank recognition of the facts of history was required rather than suppression or distortion. He claims that the Congress party, due to their desire for unified state based on Hindu–Muslim amity, invented slogans representing a Hindu–Muslim fraternity as a calculated act.22 Bhargava, however, disagrees with this ‘strategic rationalist’

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21 Ibid., pp. 197–98.

22 Majumdar suggests sarcastically that Gandhian philosophy should be taught instead of the discipline of history. See R. C. Majumdar, Historiography in Modern India, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1997, pp. 49–57.
explanation, underlining instead the overuse of the language of emotions by leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. An overemphasis on emotional integration and a deep emotional bond based on romantic notions of fraternity, and less on institutional arrangements that might have enshrined liberal principles of equality, led to misunderstandings. Bhargava argues that the dominant discourse of the Congress in relation to the Muslims was driven by principles and emotions, while that of the Muslims was driven by principles and self-interest. Even the Muslim League’s legitimate claims based on self-interest were often interpreted by the Congress leadership as ‘communal’, while talk of fellow feeling was interpreted by Muslim leaders as cloaking Hindu interests and potential Hindu hegemony. Thus a romanticised conception of community may have played an important role in preventing the communities from acknowledging their growing estrangement. Bhargava argues that this led to a situation of wish-fulfilment, even as an intense desire for lasting warmth between Hindus and Muslims masked the reality of deteriorating communal relations and increasing hostility. Rational principles that might have prevented reasonable disagreements from degenerating into hostility were thus given the go by, not only by the leadership of the time but also by historians who fell prey to the same associations in their later accounts. Such accounts to an extent manifested the traumatic effects of the sundering of the subcontinent; one may note an element of overcompensation in sentimental/emotional terms after the shock of the event.

23 It may be argued, however, that ‘Muslim’ claims were equally tinged by emotion, as Bhargava’s own citation of Qureishi bears out (“History, Nation” 200). Further, this account is insufficiently critical of the element of material self-interest underpinning Congress ideology. See Patel’s correspondence during this period for evidence of this, including his rejection of the notion of parity between communities and his concern about minority Meos returning from Pakistan, now regarded as ‘others’. In Chopra ed. Sardar Patel: Muslims and Refugees. Delhi: Konark, 2004, especially pp. 31–32, 256–57.

24 Bhargava cites the criticism of Irfan Habib, who terms the histories written by both Majumdar and Qureishi (who wrote the semi-official History of Pakistan) as not nationalist, but communal, since they share a common communal framework, which paints the other community in the blackest colours (in this case with reference to medieval history). See Bhargava, ‘History, Nation’, pp. 197, 198–99.
Important novels of the 1960s and 70s were able to look beyond the cloying emotionalism that often led to the writing of such manipulated histories. In Pakistan such histories became official accounts of the past, propping up the Pakistan ideology. In post-independence India, despite the official ideology of secularism, differences between communities were often not adequately reckoned with in terms of rationally debated principles that might underpin future interaction. Through the depiction of characters impelled by complex motives, novels about the partition often demonstrate the vulnerability of individual subjects to the working of state ideologies and community-based definitions of nationhood, as well as the possibility of resistance to such constructs. His reference to Irfan Habib’s work on communal histories apart, Bhargava does not take up in detail the implications of his argument for Indian Muslims who did not share the ideology of the Muslim League. The situation of Indian Muslims after independence as a minority often targeted by so-called ‘nationalists’ exemplifies the post-1947 dilemma of belonging and identity, as does in a different way the case of the mohajirs in Pakistan.

In Rahi Masoom Raza’s novel *Topi Shukla* (1968 trans. 2005), set in the 1960s, Iffan, a young Muslim lecturer in history, is confronted in class by a Hindu student who rattles off the views of historians like Guru Golwalkar and K. M. Munshi, describing the Mughal period as the blackest period of Indian history. Iffan later tells his wife Sakeena that while he had been taught history by the British, his student was being taught history written by the Hindus.25 He wonders whether the same thing is happening in Pakistan, with history bearing an Islamic stamp, and whether a

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‘Hindustani’ history would ever be written.26 However, he does not accept her suggestion that they leave for Pakistan, fearing that he might have to teach that before the arrival of the Muslims in India, the Hindustanis were ‘uncivilized’. Iffan realizes that both nations were chasing a mirage.27

Indeed, as Hasan points out, the decade following independence was marked by considerable fallout stemming from the partition in India. After Gandhi’s assassination in January 1948, the RSS was banned and Right-wing Hindu nationalism seemed to be in retreat. Nevertheless, sympathisers remained within the Congress to stoke latent antagonisms and resentments following large-scale violence and forced evictions.28 The Muslim community in India that did not migrate across the border remained vulnerable to attacks. Sardar Patel stated that the Muslims who stayed on in India must express their loyalty in unambiguous terms, warning that a Hindu state rather than a secular democratic state would be inevitable if the Muslims did not stop ‘communal politics’, adding: ‘You do not know what it is costing the government to protect you’.29 The Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Govind Ballabh Pant, argued that the real test of Muslim loyalty was whether the Muslims would shed their blood fighting the ‘Pakistani hordes’. The minority community thus often felt under siege, given the awareness of being regarded as potential traitors, especially after the wars fought by India and Pakistan.30

Although the political issues relating to the position to be occupied by the minority community had seemingly been solved, nationalists often stressed the need for a unitary rather than a pluralist conception of identity. This had its direct impact on Muslim cultural identity, especially in the sphere of language. Gandhi’s effort to ensure that both Hindi and Urdu were on an equal footing in northern India and his emphasis on Hindustani taught in both

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26 As Alok Rai points out, Hindustani was killed by the partition, as the idea of a shared language could not command a significant constituency. See Rai, Hindu Nationalism, New Delhi: Orient Longman, p. 113.
28 Hasan, Legacy, p. 137.
29 Ibid., p. 148.
30 Ibid., pp. 147–48.
Persian and Devanagari scripts as medium of education went in vain, as Hindi was declared the national language and Urdu was relegated to the periphery.\textsuperscript{31} Even in Uttar Pradesh, the Hindi–Urdu controversy was settled in favour of Hindi.\textsuperscript{32} Hasan describes the efforts by Nehru to combat these tendencies as Prime Minister of the Indian Republic and his fears of resurgent fascist and communist assertions. This led to compromises and the erosion of the secular compact upon which the edifice of Indian democracy rested.\textsuperscript{33} The lingering impact of the violence of the partition years and the hatreds and bitterness that the refugee community brought with them also had a role to play in this process. The Muslim community thus had to deal with an increasing sense of being placed under threat in terms of its cultural antecedents as well as of being marginalised at the political level. The significant novels to be analysed in this chapter focus on such realities as reflected at the regional and local levels, developing micro-narratives that are braided back into the narrative of collective loss and trauma.

**Representing Loss in Everyday Life: Ruins and Broken Columns**

Some of these issues and concerns are echoed in the writings of Attia Hosain.\textsuperscript{34} *Sunlight on a Broken Column* uses the distinctive technique of retrospective narration, particularly in relation to the

\textsuperscript{31} The Zakir Hussan Committee report (1938) setting out the Wardha scheme of education had suggested, following Gandhi, that students should learn Hindustani in both Persian and Devanagari scripts. In Aggarwal, *Landmarks*, p. 59.


\textsuperscript{33} Hasan, *Legacy*, pp. 149–53.

\textsuperscript{34} Attia Hosain was born in 1913 into a highly educated taluqdar family of Oudh, the Kidwais, in what was then the United Provinces. Her father studied at Cambridge and participated in the political and national moments of the time, and was a friend of Motilal Nehru, while her mother had been educated in the Persian and Urdu traditions. Hosain read extensively as a child, then went on to the Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow, and was the first woman from a taluqdar’s family to graduate from the University of Lucknow in 1933. She was unhappy at not being sent abroad to study
events of 1947. Attia Hosain’s novel achieves a poetic evocation of loss and a meditation on a lost way of life, even while sharply criticising the inequities of the *taluqdari* system. She is able to devise counter-images through the reconstruction of the memory of the quotidian and the popular, mediated through her protagonist Laila. The concerns of the Progressive Writers inform her representation of tensions within the Muslim community caused by the advent of the Pakistan demand to an extent, but her emphasis on interiority and a reflexive approach to memory distinguish her writing from that of her predecessors. In the last section of the novel Laila recalls the time leading up to the partition in terms of a personal experience of loss in the ruins of the family home. Rather than a linear account of the major historical episodes, temporal succession is modulated through the protagonist’s subjectivity. As Feuchtwang suggests, the home is a mappable place of shared memory; such territorial mapping may include, as in this case, a sense of distances, silences and blanks in the memory.\(^{35}\) Hosain’s cognitive mapping of different kinds of loss amidst the ruins at the end of the narrative includes an uncanny sense of fractures in shared memory.

*Sunlight on a Broken Column*, set in Lucknow in the 1930s and 40s, combines elements of romance and critical realism. Laila, the protagonist, is a Muslim girl belonging to a *taluqdar* family in Uttar Pradesh whose upbringing blends tradition and modernity. Although freedom of choice is denied to her and her cousin Zahra in matters pertaining to marriage, education gives her the ability to question as her brother was, and eventually married her cousin against her mother’s wishes. Hosain was an admirer of Sarojini Naidu, who persuaded her to go to the all India women’s conference in Calcutta in 1933. She wrote articles for *The Pioneer* and *The Statesman* and some short stories during the time of the partition. After independence she did not wish to go to Pakistan. Instead, she took her children to England, the country she came to know when her husband had been posted at the Indian high commission there, and earned her living presenting her own women’s programme on the eastern service of the BBC. These biographical details draw on Anita Desai’s Introduction to the novel. See Desai, ‘Introduction’, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hosain, New Delhi: Penguin, 1994, pp. vii–ix.

\(^{35}\) Such cognitive mapping of memory may be compared with that of others who have moved away, or been removed even further. See Feuchtwang, ‘Reinscriptions’, p. 72.
Partition's Afterlife

36 Laila speaks up vehemently, for example, against the exploitation of female domestic servants such as Nandi a (Hindu). 37 Laila’s grandfather Baba Jan is a storyteller, transmitting finer nuances of tradition through his tales. 38 A fair degree of communal amity exists in his household, given the close friendship between Baba Jan, Thakur Balbir Singh and Raja Hasan Ahmed, who along with Mr. Freemantle, an Englishman gone ‘native’, meet frequently. 39 Memory plays a crucial role in Laila’s awareness of the significance of childhood episodes of revelry and collective participation in festivity at the time of Shubrat, Diwali, Eid, Bakreid and Holi, due to the shadow that Baba Jan’s illness casts over the family. 40 Such shared experiences of dialogue and exchange constitute the wellspring of collective memory that the community could draw upon, sustaining the individual’s sense of self, even at times of crisis. Sacred time and the quotidian are braided during such festive occurrences, across the boundary of religious community. Such civilisational resources would subsequently be imperilled by the advent of the partition.

The narrative is critical of the way the British fomented violence and rioting in colonial India, as well as sectarian (Shia–Sunni) violence. 41 Later, a religious procession at the time of Moharram triggers a Hindu–Muslim riot. Laila’s cousin Asad is barely able to escape alive with help from courtesans, who recognise the name of the well-known tawaif (or courtesan) Mushtari Bai, who visited their home occasionally. 42 Young nationalists such as Nita Chatterjee (a Hindu friend who dies after being hit on the head by lathi blows during a demonstration) offer class-based analyses

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36 For an account of reform in the sphere of education in the Muslim community, and case histories of prominent Muslim women who received education either behind purdah or in schools and colleges in this period, including writers such as Rashid Jahan and Ismat Chughtai, see Gail Minault, Secluded Scholars: Women’s Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, especially 267–307.


38 Ibid., p. 31.

39 Ibid., pp. 34.

40 Ibid., pp. 40–43.

41 Ibid., pp. 56, 69.

42 Ibid., p. 78.
of the colonial situation and communalism at the college where Laila studies.\[^{43}\] There are several allusions to the difficulty of inter-community marriage and the ‘communal problem’, even as various demonstrations against the British Raj during the time of the Viceregal visit take place.\[^{44}\] A clandestine cross-border romance between the cynical and wealthy Sita and Laila’s cousin Kemal is destined to come to nothing with the widening of the ‘communal divide’.\[^{45}\] Laila, meanwhile, falls in love with Ameer, a young lecturer outside her social class who teaches history at Aligarh University.\[^{46}\] The pattern discerned in Shah Nawaz’s novel of inter-class romances being more likely to prevail than inter-community relationships is confirmed here, hinting at continuing anxieties as regards consanguinal taboos.

Hosain is sharply critical of the taluqdars and their shortsightedness in the face of the inevitability of reforms and the abolition of the zamindari system.\[^{47}\] Events leading up to the 1935 Provincial Assembly elections appear in this section of the narrative.\[^{48}\] In Laila’s view politicians simply use fear and fanaticism to serve their

\[^{43}\] Ibid., pp. 124–25.
\[^{44}\] Ibid., pp. 133–47.
\[^{45}\] Ibid., p. 216.
\[^{46}\] Ibid., pp. 191, 223.
\[^{47}\] Ibid., pp. 231–33. As Hasan points out, landlords formed the largest single group in the Muslim League council. The Raja of Mahmudabad was the most prominent League supporter in Awadh. See M. Hasan, *Legacy*, pp. 75–76. The UP Tenancy Bill was construed as a conspiracy against Muslim landlords and considered destructive of the culture of the minority community sustained by the patronage of the Muslim landed aristocracy. Consequently they rushed to the League to thwart the ‘Bolshevik menace’. Jinnah harnessed this dissatisfaction to great effect after 1937, with influential sections of the landed aristocracy moving across to his side. See M. Hasan, *Legacy*, pp. 77.

\[^{48}\] See Rasheed’s essay for an incisive summary of the social and political events leading up to and culminating in the Government of India Act, 1935 under which the 1937 Provincial Assembly elections were held. Rasheed’s description of Laila’s stance as ‘liberal armchair intellectualism’, in contrast to the ‘activist-nationalist’ Asad, is somewhat reductive though, since it is Laila’s inner transformation and rebellion that is emphasised, in contrast to those inheriting the comforts of a privileged existence. See Rasheed, ‘Politics of Location: Locating Politics in Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column*’ in U. M. Nanavati and Prafulla Kar eds. *Rethinking Indian English Literature*, Delhi: Pencraft. pp. 126–37.
Ameer, on the other hand, has a more positive view of developments in the political sphere. Hosain sensitively depicts antagonisms and self-destructive domestic feuds that enfeeble women within the cloistered _zenana_ (the women’s quarters). Towards the end of the novel there is a clear statement about the perils of religious fanaticism, as well as that of extreme revolutionary fervour. Salim Laila’s cousin, articulates an anti-Congress standpoint, arguing the case for joining the Muslim League while expressing sympathy for the idea of an independent Pakistan. However, internal divisions within the community are stressed as well, even as seedy politicians such as Sheikh Waliuddin, who had earlier incited Shia–Sunni riots, join the Muslim League. The novel thus articulates different voices and positions, tracing the tendencies that culminated in breakdown of communication and mutual understanding, even while projecting Laila’s reformist ideas and desire for social change.

Part Four of the novel is narrated from the point of view of the protagonist, who visits the family home fourteen years later. Laila recollects prior events such as the crisis in her family when she conveyed her decision to marry Ameer, after which she set up an independent home. By contrast, Salim moved to Pakistan with his wife Nadira, whom he married against his father’s wishes, precipitating a rift in the family. The metaphor of the rift becomes resonant as greedy and powerful politicians such as Sita’s father Agarwal take hold of the Indian economy in their ‘octopus like grip’. This was a time when many Muslim properties were declared evacuee properties, after many migrated to the newly formed nation state of Pakistan. The transition from being a wealthy and dominant force

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49 Hosain, *Sunlight*, p. 245.
50 Ibid., p. 251.
51 Ibid., p. 233.
52 Ibid., pp. 195–96.
53 Ibid., p. 273.
54 Ibid., p. 289.
55 Ibid., p. 294.
56 The Evacuee Property Laws were most inequitable, and Muslims could not easily dispose of their property or carry on trade for fear that the long arm of the property law might catch up with them. Such laws restricted business opportunities and crippled large numbers of Muslims, especially in the north and west of India. Indeed, some old Congressmen continued to send small sums of money to their relations in Pakistan, on which they were declared evacuees or intending evacuees. See M. Hasan, *Legacy*, p. 180.
in society to becoming indigent and impoverished castaways in the case of many of the formerly aristocratic families is dramatised here.\textsuperscript{57} The perils faced by those who remained in India such as Asad and Laila come to the fore when they visit a club with their friend Ranjit Singh and are accused of being traitors by a Sikh in a blue turban, exemplifying the double-bind faced by Indian Muslims targeted by such refugees from Punjab.\textsuperscript{58} Laila almost becomes a victim of previous victims, as the continuing cycle of retaliatory violence is drawn attention to. The afterlife of partition violence has to be contended with by those who choose to stay on, even as previous traumatic incidents not adequately resolved in the public domain lead to such unexpected confrontations and attempts to find a scapegoat.

Laila’s experience of poverty and her sceptical view of the revolutionary idealists whom she encounters during the early years of her marriage are retrospectively described.\textsuperscript{59} Tragically, her husband Ameer dies during the Second World War, leaving her alone with their child.\textsuperscript{60} Laila is rescued during the violence, first by Sita and later by Ranjit who risks his life to ensure their safety as Muslim households are deliberately targeted by mobs.\textsuperscript{61} Zahra describes similar instances of violence on the other side of the border.\textsuperscript{62} Though Asad retains his faith in non-violence, it is severely tested by the death of his brother Zahid while migrating to Pakistan, although he makes a conscious effort to restrain his bitterness. Finally, there is the prospect of Laila finding a point of rest and possibly a future with Asad.\textsuperscript{63} This recollection of the preceding

\textsuperscript{57} Hosain, \textit{Sunlight}, pp. 277–78.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p. 301.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 315.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 317.
\textsuperscript{61} As Hasan shows, many Hindus and Sikhs did risk their lives to save Muslims, following the lead taken by Nehru himself. In Hasan’s account these responses were in sharp counterpoint to the attitude of counterparts in Pakistan, where there was no concerted endeavour to contain the orgy of violence against Hindus and Sikhs. See M. Hasan, \textit{Legacy}, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., pp. 318–19. I disagree with Mukherjee’s characterisation of the last section as Laila indulging in an ‘orgy of sentimentality’ and her criticism of Hosain’s ‘overindulgence in nostalgia and sentimentality’. See Meenakshi Mukherjee, \textit{The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of
traumatic history takes place in the ruins of the family home. The dispersal of the family also entails the scattering of a way of life. Laila has perforce witnessed a process of fragmentation that had its roots, the narrative suggests, in failures at both the personal and social levels to recognise and deal with injustice.

The narrative thus engages indirectly with the partition experience as it looks back in time to the situation of taluqdari families in the United Provinces prior to independence. As Mushirul Hasan reminds us, Awadh taluqdars accustomed to supporting themselves from rental income of their estates were severely affected by the abolition of the zamindari system. Hence, many left for Pakistan, while others retired to anonymity in their villages. Those dependent on them were often the worst off, given that their patrons no longer had the wherewithal to commission their goods. Some of the smaller zamindars, nevertheless, did retain their position through migration to cities in search of better opportunities, while some as a result of being close to the Congress were able to establish themselves in influential positions in government, the diplomatic service and the educational sector. Hasan distinguishes between the zamindars of Eastern Uttar Pradesh and those of Western Uttar Pradesh, who were able to prosper, given that they had switched allegiance to the Congress and had achieved some degree of goodwill on account of implementing certain provisions of agrarian legislation. Even so, there was a gradual decline in their fortunes in comparison with the privileges enjoyed earlier, as in the case of the depiction of the plight of the Raja of Amirpur in the novel.

The formal structure of the novel is unusual. Hosain depicts through linear narration the important years when Laila grows up and becomes mature enough to think through social and political issues. Her conscious decision to narrate the last section retrospectively from Laila’s point of view allows Hosain a degree of reflexivity.

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64 Hasan, Legacy, p. 184.
65 Ibid., pp. 185–86.
Furthermore, the micro-narrative of Laila’s personal experience of loss (of both her family and her husband, though not directly on account of collective violence) allows us to enter into the experience of those who may not have been refugees, but who did suffer nonetheless. Other individual tragedies may often be elided, the narrative suggests, as the macro-narratives of the partition and the achievement of independence take precedence. Indeed, there is an element of the uncanny in this journey down memory lane as well as a perception of frozen time, amidst the ruins of the home that once sustained Laila.

The difference between Laila and her cousin Zahra is rendered explicit, insofar as Zahra enjoys a privileged lifestyle despite having migrated to Pakistan. There is also a sharp questioning of the actual motives of many who opted to journey across to the newly formed nation state in which they were to occupy positions of power. Laila sacrifices precious family ties on account of a romantic attachment that is destined for a tragic end. The contrast between her self-willed destiny and that of a section of the Muslim elite who supported the Pakistan movement is significant, without being reducible to an ideological comment. The historical trauma of the partition is personalised through the lens of such a witness figure, whose voice modulates the effects of loss.

The explicit allusion to T. S. Eliot’s poem ‘The Hollow Men’ in the title and the epigraph of the novel help frame Laila’s wistful recollections of a time of relative coherence and wholeness that had given way to a phase of chaos and anarchy. The personal domain and the individual’s capacity for recollection of time past remains a fragile buffer against the ravages of historical time, which mercilessly erodes the textures of family and community life. Sunlight on a Broken Column poetically articulates Hosain’s sense of distress at this loss, even as she unsparingly criticises weaknesses within family and community and the emptiness underlying much political activism.

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67 Hasan mentions Saifuddin Kitchlew and Hasrat Mohani in particular as nationalists with impeccable credentials who died in penury after playing their part in the freedom struggle with great courage. In his words the Congress Muslims who preferred acting as powerbrokers soon displaced the legacy of such leaders. See M. Hasan, Legacy, p. 195.
and rhetoric that culminated in division. Through transcending bitterness and forging new ties, as Asad does, a shared future might nevertheless be realised. Unlike the ending of The Heart Divided, there is no expression of millenarian optimism in the conclusion. Even so, as in Shah Nawaz’s novel, the personal domain provides space for qualified hope. The novel also causes us to rethink historical explanations such as that of R. C. Majumdar that describe Hindu–Muslim amity as a mere Congress slogan as well as nationalist histories that rely on a notion of absolute difference between communities.

Hosain instead foregrounds the need for the recovery of the significance of the realm of the quotidian, in which possibilities of understanding and accommodation of difference might be achieved in practice.68 As in the case of the gatherings in Baba Jan’s house, which might feature recitations of poetry by a tawaif (courtesan), the inclusive mode of being in such households allows for the augmentation of collective memory through dialogue and exchange. Such dialogic practices enabled a connection with the vitality of the realm of the popular, especially during the festivals of Id and Holi. The movement beyond the time of catastrophic violence might occur, Hosain’s novel seems to suggest, through a recuperation of such individual and community memory of the ways sacred time could become part of everyday interchange, through symbols that had a valence across community borders. The narrative does not, however, negotiate the dark side of popular religiosity in any degree of detail, which could feed into configurations of the collective based on the hatred of the other.69 Even so, while the last section is retrospectively narrated as Laila’s memory, the entire novel is effectively a meditation on lost time, a journey back in time from the ruins in the present. Sunlight on a Broken Column offers a different way of seeing both past and present, generating a poetic mode of description without loss of specificity pertaining to the historical moment. Hosain’s imaginative redeployment of codes of realism interspersed with poetic reflection thus marks a departure from the writings of the earlier period.

68 On the question of the importance of the quotidian, though not with reference to Hosain, see Bhalla, ‘Memory, History’, p. 3120.
69 A discussion with Deepak Mehta helped clarify this point.
Mapping Boundaries in the Personal and Public Spheres

Perhaps the most important novel on the partition written in Pakistan appeared in 1963, after the initial phase of relative silence. *Udas Naslein* (trans. *The Wéary Generations* (1999)), by Muhammad Khan, who writes under the pseudonym Abdullah Hussein, covers a much longer time span than many of the other novels we have dealt with so far. The narrative encompasses a wide sweep of colonial history leading up to the events of the partition. The novel, which took five years to write, was based on research into the history of the partition and stories told by survivors to the author, since his own family (based in Gujrat, West Punjab) was not directly affected by the violence. The setting of parts of the novel in a small town in Punjab draws on the author’s experience, nevertheless. Naim, the protagonist, falls in love with Azra, the daughter of a loyalist *jagirdar* and is eventually torn between his political preferences and the class alliance his marriage to Azra entails. The narrative interweaves the themes of melancholy and disconnection in the personal

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70 Abdullah Hussein was born in Rawalpindi in 1931. He graduated from a college in Punjab with a science degree, and worked as a chemist’s apprentice at Dandot, Jhelum for some time. He began writing sketches during this phase during which he developed an affinit for the Punjab peasantry; these may have later contributed to the writing of *The Wéary Generations*. In 1959 Hussein left for Canada under the Colombo Plan to specialize in cement technology at McMaster University, Hamilton. During his stay in Canada Hussein met several writers, including Hemingway. During his return trip he also met T. S. Eliot, as well as Sartre and Picasso. After the publication of his novel he migrated to the United Kingdom where he worked for the London coal gas board as an apprentice chemist. He spent some years in Pakistan subsequently, but settled eventually in the United Kingdom. Hussein has produced his major work in Urdu, although he has written one novel in English. See Memon’s biographical profile in Hussein, *Downfall by Degrees*, trans. Memon, New Delhi: Katha, pp. 13–20.


Partition’s Afterlife

and public realms with reference to the partition, which becomes a metaphor for gaps and failed relationships between people and society. According to Hussein, the novel is not so much a historical novel but a love story, given his conviction that love was the single most enabling force in life and that everything else radiated out of it, whether human emotion or art. For him history too was a function of love in its broadest sense, as was politics. There is a subtle artistic interweaving of the theme of growing emotional distance between protagonist Naim (who belongs to the middle peasantry) and Azra and fissures that appear at different levels of the social formation as the narrative unfolds. Once again this micro-narrative is braided into the wider tapestry of experience of the nationalist struggle and the partition. However, Hussein’s experience of travel and education abroad and the fact that he was not a refugee himself perhaps gave him a degree of intellectual and emotional latitude as he interwove the central love story with historical crises that culminated in the partition.

The novel begins with a man on horseback enclosing land within a boundary created by insects following a trail of honey—an unorthodox, though effective, method of indicating ownership of property. An act of good will at the time of the mutiny of 1857 leads the family of Roshan Ali, later named Roshan Agha, to prosperity, as he is rewarded with as much land as he could ride around in a single day for helping a wounded British officer; the device allows for reflection on the arbitrariness of boundary divisions. Naim is a descendant of this line, although his branch of the family has suffered reversals of fortune; he has spent much of his earlier life in Calcutta. Naim is invited to a gathering at his wealthy relative Roshan Agha’s (a direct descendant of the beneficiary of the British) house in Delhi. Prominent leaders such as Annie Besant and Mr. Gokhle are amongst those invited to this meeting. There is a heated discussion about the role of Tilak, who had recently been sent to jail, during which Naim speaks up on his behalf (attracting his distant cousin Azra’s attention).

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75 On the role of Gokhle in nationalist politics, see Sarkar. Tilak, as Sarkar demonstrates, blazed the trail for Extremism. See Sumit Sarkar,
alongside soldiers from different nations in the trenches of Europe during the First World War, during which he loses an arm, which is replaced with a wooden limb. Naim returns to his village battle-weary and is recruited by a group of ‘terrorists’ who blow up railway tracks and carry out assassinations. He is rapidly disillusioned, even though he learns more about the reasons for espousing violence. The covert and clandestine nature of the group’s actions eventually disenchants Naim. He leaves after arguing the case for a different mode of protest, for standing up and demanding one’s rights. An alternative perspective on the espousal of revolutionary violence by such splinter groups comes to the fore in this section. This ethical stance resonates through the narrative, right up to the end. Maimed during the war, Naim bears witness to the fact that the ‘tactic’ of counter-violence can all too easily turn within and damage the self.

Naim marries Azra, despite her family’s disapproval and she moves with him to a large house with a garden in Roshan Agha’s ancestral property. Azra persuades Naim (busy with responsibilities of farming the land) to join her on a fact-finding inquiry to Amritsar. The incident of the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh is described from the point of view of a witness, a fish-vendor who believes that a fish taken from his pail and thrown at a British officer triggered the massacre. The curious retelling of this incident by

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77 ‘Terrorism’ began in 1897, in response to mishandling of the plague situation in Poona. See Sarkar, Modern India, p. 100. As Amin shows, demobilised soldiers in uniform participated in anti-police and anti-landlord battles in Awadh during the course of a peasant movement. Bhagwan Ahir, one of the ‘volunteers’ accused in the Chauri Chaura incident, was a returned soldier from the Mesopotamia theatre of the First World War. See Amin, Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–92, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995 (rpt 1996), pp. 39, 80.


79 Ibid., p. 184.

80 The mounting British repression of protests against the unpopular Rowlatt Act intensified after the firing in the walled area of Jallianwalla Bagh on 13 April 1919 and included the notorious crawling order and public
this witness figure also includes a fairly graphic account of the violence directed towards a white woman prior to the massacre, rendering history afresh. The fish-vendor’s sense of culpability haunts him, even as he follows the atrocity through to the point when the British took their revenge by getting Indians to crawl the length of the street where the white woman was disrobed. The notion of the fish as somehow becoming the causal agent is grotesque and adds an element of the surreal to the description.\(^8\) The stylised description ‘from below’ is implicitly contrasted with the staid and often ineffective rhetoric of fact-finding commissions. An alternative mode of literary witnessing, in which seemingly trivial or inconsequential details may allow for fresh light to be cast on historical events is articulated here. The novelist’s eye picks out the fragmentary detail and reconstitutes the historical moment, underscoring individual culpability and the notion of irrational survivor guilt in the wake of a traumatic event.

Naim becomes more concerned with nationalist issues after his visit to Amritsar, especially after the exoneration of Gen. Dyer (misspelled Dwyer in the novel’s English translation), bringing a down-to-earth perspective to bear on nationalist concerns. In contrast, Azra’s involvement is somewhat superficial, as shown by her inability to participate fully in a protest action during the visit of the Prince of Wales to Delhi.\(^8\) Naim makes an effort to instil in people a sense of their power to achieve things by a new kind of force, a force of resistance without violence. This allusion to Gandhi’s ideas is muted and tempered by an acknowledgement of Naim’s limited success in achieving his goal.\(^8\) After an account of a demonstration against the Simon commission in Lucknow, a description of an all-India Muslim conference held opposite the Jamia Masjid, in Delhi follows.\(^8\) Naim now begins to perceive his wife’s ‘coarseness’ and

\(^{8}\) Ibid., pp. 199–204.
\(^{8}\) Ibid., p. 207.
\(^{8}\) Sarkar provides a useful account of the anti-Simon campaign in 1928 and the effective demonstration in Lucknow on 28–30 November. During this action, Khaliquzzaman floated kites and balloons with ‘Go Back Simon’ slogans over a taluqdar representation to the commission at Kaiserbagh, while Jawaharlal Nehru and Pant were beaten up by the police. See Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 265–66.
superficial understanding of what was really at stake. As leaders such as Aga Khan emphasise the need for unity, Naim realises that though at the personal level he and his wife had merged, they remained apart in spaces echoing with suspicion. Naim understands that he is just a poor farmer; the gap between them seems to be insuperable, since she is lost in her own passions and has nothing to do with him. The disconnection in the personal realm also mirrors growing rifts in the public sphere and hints at the growing distance of the elite from the common people, a factor contributing to the hardening of religious identity.

Naim participates in the salt satyagraha called by Gandhi and later travels to Peshawar, where non-violent Pathan demonstrators are fired upon by British troops in Qissa Khwani bazaar. The story of the Khudai Khidmatgars tended to be downplayed in Pakistani histories, given their support for the Congress. This episode retrieves this lost historical memory, acknowledging the sacrifices made by the followers of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Consequently, Naim spends several years in jail, during which his health suffers considerably. The distance between himself and Azra grows, as he does not even wish her to visit him in jail. Naim gradually recovers from his illness after suffering a stroke. He is treated by Dr Ansari, a prominent figure in the nationalist movement, who asks him whether he is a believer in religion and describes to him in scientific terms the positive aspects of religious belief in the healing process.

87 For a discussion (cited earlier) of the memories of some Khudai Khidmatgars, followers of the Frontier Gandhi, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, see M. Banerjee, ‘Partition and the North West Frontier’, pp. 30–73.
89 Hasan tells us that Dr M. A. Ansari was virtually prevented from attending the Round Table Conferences in London (1930–33), convened by the British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald to resolve the political deadlock in India. Rank communalists on the other hand were welcomed with open arms and feted. See M. Hasan, *Legacy*, p. 36. See Hussein, *The Weary*, pp. 277–82.
realm's in these episodes and the interweaving of fictional and historical characters/events allows a distinctive, personalised mode of witnessing to evolve. Here, the synthesis of traditional ideas and modern medicine in the person of Dr Ansari is brought to the fore, as a counter to stereotypical ideas about Islamic culture.

In the last section of the novel, Roshan Agha is torn between two points of view during a family discussion on whether to move to Pakistan or not. He has no attachment to the land itself, since his loyalty lay with the ownership of land and by virtue of that with people. He had also decided to convert to the cause of the Muslim League. His son Pervez makes the case for moving to Pakistan, given that they would be able to make a claim for the land left behind by Hindus and Sikhs.90 Further, his own career in the civil service would benefit from the move, since there would be unlimited chances for promotion to the top, given the shortage of Muslim administrators in Pakistan. Azra wonders why he assumes that Hindus and Sikhs would leave their lands. In reply Pervez points to the riots taking place and the retaliatory attacks taking place in different parts of the country. Naim is sharply reminded of his position in the family when after having expressed no particular opinion he is cut short by Pervez, who reminds him that he has no stake one way or the other since he has no family or property of his own.91 Clearly, economic, rather than religious or ideological, reasons pre-dominate in this account of the logic for migration amongst a section of the elite. Elite snobbery and contempt for those a peasant like Naim is unmasked as well.

During a spell of growing disorientation Naim witnesses a demonstration in front of the Assembly building where he had been

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90 This satirical rendering of the decision making process in this family may remind us of Hasan’s citation of Hamza Alavi’s emphasis on the role played by the Muslim salariat of northern India in the Pakistan movement. Anxieties about jobs and promotions did get articulated through the movement. Further, as Hasan shows, the Muslim landowning group was a class apart and had received active British patronage. Subsequently they had laid down the terms of organised communitarian politics, set up the Simla deputation in October 1906 and lent moral and material sanction to the Muslim League. However, in the 1930s rapid political changes wrought about their eclipse, as noted above in the analysis of Sunlight on A Broken Column. Cited in M. Hasan, Legacy, p. 73.

working. The police lathi-charge the demonstrators in front of his eyes and at this point he has a vision of regression, as if everything he knew was sliding back, receding. Instead of continuing with his work, Naim comes out of the building and simply walks away.\textsuperscript{92} It is as if he is impelled to become witness to the unfolding catastrophe and cannot remain any longer within the confines of a semi-privileged existence. We may also be reminded of Erikson’s discussion of Gandhi’s feeling of being under an existential curse and his desire to exorcise this through personal intervention and fasting to stop the violence, which became a form of embodied witnessing.\textsuperscript{93} Here, it is as if Naim accepts that his family is accursed ever since accepting the land from the British as a reward, right up to this culminating reversal of fortune.

The last section of the novel in the form of an epilogue is, even in its brevity, a remarkable narrativisation of the situation of many who fled and took to the road on the journey to Pakistan. Naim is part of the huge column of refugees; he does not speak to anyone and is left alone by those who assume that he is a man of God. At the railway station at Ambala Naim meets Ali, who had left Delhi two months before.\textsuperscript{94} The trains are jam-packed with refugees, and Naim and Ali decide to resort to the carts and the road once again. Later, proper rituals are observed in the case of the first man who dies along the way, possibly from exposure or starvation. There is savage irony in the sharp contrast established between this and what follows, as soon as they enter the province in which marauding bands are waiting to attack, just as Hindus and Sikhs are being attacked on the other side after ‘the good judge Cyril Radcliffe after much concern and absent-minded deliberation drew a line in red ink dividing it in two, each half going to a different country’.\textsuperscript{95} Naim and Ali negotiate the extreme difficulties of the journey, even

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., p. 306.
\textsuperscript{93} See Erikson, \textit{Gandhi’s Truth}, pp. 132–33.
\textsuperscript{94} Within ten days of Pakistan’s creation, 25,000 Muslim refugees were streaming across from East Punjab each day. See Talbot, \textit{Pakistan}, p. 104.
\textsuperscript{95} Hussein, \textit{The Weary}, p. 318. On Radcliffe’s appointment by the Partition Council as the Chairman of the Punjab and Bengal Boundary Commissions, see Pyarelal, \textit{Mahatma Gandhi}, p. 295. For a critical discussion of the rapidity with which the boundary lines were drawn, see Sarkar, \textit{Modern India}, p. 452.
as the column suffers no real harm until they reach the outskirts of Amritsar. Hussein exercises aesthetic restraint in his description of the horror of the situation. The column of refugees passes a mob of Sikhs and Hindus with spears, swords and long handled cleavers and with clothes covered in blood, simply too exhausted to launch any fresh attacks. The refugees feel doubly beholden to the ones who had passed before them and fallen, and have no more time for burial rituals. The evacuation of empathy for prior victims and the erosion of the meaningfulness of sacred time are the outcome of extreme conditions in this limit situation, reinforcing the irony of their own desperate push for the boundary-line beyond which ‘safety’ lies. Profiteering occurs and necessities such as food and water become increasingly scarce. Naim remains a mute witness to this grim situation.

Meanwhile, Ali helps Naim, using his skills at dealing with villagers en route while impersonating a Hindu traveller. They meet a history professor from Aligarh walking by their cart who draws attention to the fact that they are witnessing history. He expresses his determination to teach this history to the next generation, rather than the history of maharajas and kings that he had been used to teaching so far. Hussein here demonstrates an awareness of the propensity to write histories from the point of view of the elite and the perils of denial of such histories of violence and suffering. Hussein here reflexively alludes to the double bind facing those who seek to interrupt the dominant historical narrative. Eventually, Naim dies an unnecessary death in the Punjab plains. As Ahmad points out, the fact that he is lost without a trace is a novelistic device to signify a situation in which elements of nostalgia for a lost world are tied to a literal loss of direction and the possibility of connection for the ‘hero’.

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96 Hussein refers to witness accounts that gave him the idea for this description. See ‘“A Conversation With Abdullah Hussein (Part One)” with Rehan Ansari’.


98 Ibid., p. 322.

99 Eyewitness accounts recall the bodies heaped on either side of the road from Amritsar to Lahore, converting the whole area into a massive graveyard. See Talbot, Pakistan, p. 104.

100 Ahmad, ‘In the Mirror of Urdu’, p. 213.
Pervez’s family decides not to travel by air due to their unwillingness to part with any of their baggage. Ironically enough, during their train journey they lose most of their possessions. Roshan Agha passes away shortly after their arrival in Pakistan, as they await the ordinance that would guarantee them possession of the evacuee property they had occupied. Meanwhile, at the railway station Ali is rescued by a woman who tends to his needs. She, ten years older to him, is a recent convert to Islam. There is some prospect of a future life together, despite the attrition and violence that surrounds them. Survivors such as Ali cannot look to the state to ensure rehabilitation, however, and must find their own way, even as they witness the continuation of retaliatory violence in the nation to which they now belong.

_The Weary Generations_ thus constitutes an incisive commentary on the pointlessness and absurdity of the violence and dislocation of the partition years. Hussein attempts a different mode of narration, written mainly from the point of view of the middle peasantry, exemplified by the protagonist. Naim’s historical consciousness evolves even as he simultaneously reckons with his responsibilities as a farmer and his tangled relationship with Azra. It is not as if sacrifices made by Naim and others are disclosed to be hollow and meaningless, it is rather the logic of pre-existing structures that determines the way in which the moment of Independence was realised. The diagnosis of the pervasive sense of melancholy and angst provides insights into the psychology of individuals caught up in historical developments that seem to defeat the possibility of complete understanding. It is as if an alternative vision that might have enabled the transcendence of boundaries cannot quite be realised, leading to the persistent sense of melancholy. Furthermore, this ‘udasi’ or pervasive sadness is carried over from previous generations that had not worked through the tangled knots inherited from the feudal past. Hussein’s narrative also indicates the perils

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102 Ibid., pp. 329–30. Pakistan’s 1951 census enumerated 7 million people as of refugee origin, most arriving between August and November 1947, with 4.6 million Muslims evacuated from East Punjab alone. The new government of Pakistan was totally unprepared for the massive scale of migration. See Talbot, _Pakistan_, pp. 101–2.
of uncritical nostalgia, which may lead to paralysis and loss of direction. The novel steers clear of the ‘oversweet romanticism’ that Memon discerns in the writings of some of the Progressives, often employed by them in the name of socialist realism.\textsuperscript{103} Rather, the fresh style and unsettling mode of literary witnessing opens up new descriptive possibilities, as a form of critical realism.\textsuperscript{104} The micronarrative of the relationship between Naim and Azra is situated carefully in localised contexts through which the crisis-ridden pre-history of the partition is re-envisioned. The passage of time since the event and his own location as an insider/outsider allowed Hussein to develop such a critical account of failures in the personal and public realms, leading to an interrogation of the very idea of heroism in the wake of the catastrophe of 1947.

**Multiple Temporalities, Localised Identities**

The two novels discussed in this section pose specific problems due to their embeddedness in regional contexts of narration and concern with aspects of language politics that may be lost in translation. *Adha Gaon* (1966 trans. *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli/Half a Village* 1994), by Rahi Masoom Raza, reckons with historical memory from an Indian Muslim’s point of view.\textsuperscript{105} The perspective of the small zamindars and Muslim peasantry of Uttar Pradesh underlies the semi-autobiographical narration of events that take place in the village Gangauli (inhabited mainly by Shia Muslims) between 1931 and 1952. Raza articulates here the dilemmas and predicament of Muslims living in village societies away

\textsuperscript{103} See Memon, Introduction in Hussein, *Downfall by Degrees*, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{104} As Hussein himself alludes to in an interview. See “A Conversation With Abdullah Hussein (Part One)” with Rehan Ansari’.

\textsuperscript{105} Rahi Masoom Raza was born in Ghazipur district of Uttar Pradesh, where he received his early education. He took a Ph.D. at the Aligarh Muslim University, where he was a brilliant student of Urdu, Hindi and Sanskrit. He taught at the Aligarh Muslim University, and was a proponent of Urdu in the Devanagari script. He later moved to Bombay, where he became a successful screenplay writer, and wrote the screenplays and dialogues for over 300 films, including B. R. Chopra’s television series *Mahabharata*. These biographical details precede the text in the translation by Gillian Wright. See *Adha Gaon* (trans. *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli/Half a Village*).
from the mainstream. As Alok Rai points out, the novel explores the ‘difficult terrain where the nostalgic memory of social harmony is bound up with a historical awareness of inequality, and injustice and exploitation’.

Raza also gives voice through his characters to debates within the Muslim community as regards the validity of the ideology of the Pakistan movement.

As Alok Bhalla argues, the author elaborates three notions of time, which give structure and ethicality to the words, thoughts and actions of the people who live in the village. Indeed, the narrator refers to the narrative as being about time, it is ‘...the story of time passing through Gangauli’, ‘...the story of the ruins where houses stood, and of the houses built on those ruins’. As Bhalla points out, the novel’s texture is woven out of the sacred days of the origin of Islam, the historically significant time of the national movement and the daily routine of labour and toil of the people of Gangauli. This multiple sense of temporality is elaborated with reference to rituals, especially pertaining to Shia Muslims at the time of Moharram, as well as events that take place on the political front during different phases of the freedom movement, until the demand for Pakistan. There is also a description of actual practices of the people, grounded in cycles of the seasons and bound by the regimen of working on the land. However, even the sense of sacred time is intimately bound up here with the materiality of the quotidian. For example, sacrifices made by the Prophet’s son-in-law Hasan seem to be re-enacted in the context of happenings in the realm of everyday experience, given density and meaning through Shia mourning rituals, which eventually encompass deaths that occur during the partition violence. Karbala, site of the martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandson Hussain, has a local resonance in the lives of the people, as they reinvent the apocryphal story of loss in the regional idiom. The realm of the popular allows for an interpenetration of sacred time and the time of labour and daily struggle during the cyclical rituals and activities of rural life. However, historical time causes disjunctions in the experience of continuity of such

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106 Rai, Hindi Nationalism, p. 62.
popular practices. The claim by Muslim League activists that the new state will deliver a sense of security for those practicing sacred rituals is rejected by the villagers, for whom the assertion of absolute difference between communities made by advocates of the Pakistan demand is meaningless. Motifs of ruins and devastated time predominate, especially in the sections dealing with the post-partition experience of Indian Muslims.

Other key issues raised in the novel pertaining to the partition experience include the incomprehension of smaller zamindars and peasants when faced with the question of moving to Pakistan, or of supporting the Muslim League in its effort to get the country partitioned, as well as the politics of language.\textsuperscript{110} Raza’s egalitarian outlook underpins the depiction of conflicts amongst minor landowners, whose holdings would eventually be diminished by the Zamindari Abolition Act, as well as disputes in the inner household.\textsuperscript{111} The character Phunnan Miyan repudiates in colourful language the argument for a separate state for Muslims and opposes any proposal to move away from lands in which their forefathers had died.\textsuperscript{112} The author deploys satire to good effect as the villagers respond in the local dialect (a mixture of Urdu, Hindi and Bhojpuri) to the campaign for Pakistan by students from Aligarh Muslim University. The episode undercuts both the rhetoric of high politics conducted in Urdu, as well as the spurious identification of Urdu and Muslims. Tannu, a returned soldier who fought for the British army during the Second World War, defends local perceptions and language, rejecting the presumption of identifying language and religious community.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{110} Raza, \textit{Half a Village}, pp. 149 and 301.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 300.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 149.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., pp. 241–51. As mentioned in Chapter Two, this identification of language and religious community could be traced back to the Hunter Commission on Education, 1882. See Sethi, ‘The Creation of Religious Identities’, unpublished dissertation, p. 102, also Oberoi, \textit{The Construction}, p. 349. For a discussion of the ways in which Orientalists such as John Gilchrist popularised the names ‘Hindustani’ and ‘Urdu’ in order to spread the notion of two languages, one for Hindus, one for Muslims, see Francesca Orsini, \textit{The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–40: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism}, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 2–3.
Indeed, popular cults and modes of worship, which could include a carnivalesque side, tended to dissolve rather than reinforce boundaries in practice. The people of Gangauli draw on earlier conceptions of temporality, whether the localised notions of sacred time or the (sometimes profane) rhythms of everyday life, to articulate resistance to such processes. The ebb and flow of ritual life around the time of Moharram and the occasionally unpredictable interplay between the sacred and the profane in Gangauli is eventually affected by migrations that take place during the partition. There seems to be an attenuation of awareness of sacred time as the customary rituals take on the burden of collective trauma on account of unexpected deaths and departures.

Raza uses the unusual structural device of placing an introduction in the middle of his novel in which the narrator makes an explicit reference to accusations made by right wing Hindu political parties that Muslims were outsiders in India. Irony is deployed to devastating effect in the debunking of this thesis, as the narrator reasserts his bond with the locality and right to belong. ‘The Jan Sangh says the Muslims are outsiders. How can I presume to say they are lying? But I must say that I belong to Ghazipur. My bonds with Gangauli are unbreakable. It’s not just a village, it’s my home’. The conventions of Urdu storytelling allow for such instances of direct address to the reader, for as Trivedi points out, Raza

As she points out, Urdu remained the dominant vernacular till the 20th century, while the use of Khari Boli Hindi remained uneven. Later, there was a self-conscious adoption of Khari Boli Hindi as a public language, a cultural movement that according to Orsini, the Urdu intellectuals could not comprehend. See Orsini, The Hindi Public Sphere, p. 3. Raza reverses this long cultural history of mutual incomprehension between the communities.

On the unsuccessful attempts to sanitise popular culture activities by the elite, especially in UP through ‘reformism’ in the 1930s and 40s, after which the elite largely withdrew from them, see Sandria B. Freitag, Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989 (rpt 1990), pp. 297–98. Raza’s narrative captures the moment at which sections of the elite reinvented religious traditions and attempted to homogenise the community on religious grounds, as such historical accounts demonstrate. I am indebted to Dilip Menon for this insight.


Ibid., p. 290.
was influenced by the *qissa-goi*, a tradition of telling tales wherein the charm of the tale lies in its telling and the teller constitutes as much a source of enjoyment as the tale itself.\(^{117}\) The incorporation of polemics against Hindu nationalist ideologues situates the novel with reference to the moment when the novel was written, when the Jana Sangh’s inflammatory rhetoric reinforced the sense of alienation of the minority community. The narrator rejects the hatred for the ‘other’ religion that could manifest itself in a given economy of affect through invective and hate speech.\(^{118}\) This polemical repudiation of such communalist rhetoric about Muslims as ‘outsiders’ does, however, stand in contrast to the subtle criticism of the erosion of coexisting and multiple conceptions of temporality in the popular domain earlier alluded to. The post-1947 recrudescence of right-wing communal ideology may account for this, despite what Bhalla describes as Raza’s aesthetics of reticence about the horror of 1947.\(^{119}\) Such topical interventions are also a feature of ‘*aanchlik*’ or regional novels in Hindi, a form of writing the narrative seems to align itself with.\(^{120}\)

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\(^{117}\) Trivedi reminds us that *Adha Gaon* was first written in Urdu, i.e. in the Persio-Arabic script, but was first submitted to a Hindi publisher, Rajendra Yadav and edited by Kamleshwar, a Hindi writer, before being published in the Devanagari script. The novel was not published in Urdu until 2003. Raza thus did his best to bridge the gap between Hindi and what he regarded as a common language between Hindus and Muslims, i.e., Urdu. See Trivedi’s Introduction in Raza, *Topi Shukla*, p. 6.


\(^{119}\) Bhalla, ‘Memory, History’, p. 3126.

\(^{120}\) A discussion with Ravikant helped clarify some of the ideas presented in this paragraph.
Raza’s second novel, *Topi Shukla*, depicts the life and death of a young Hindi scholar at Aligarh Muslim University. Balbhadra Narayan or Topi Shukla’s unusual friendship with the Muslim history teacher Iffan and his wife Sakeena, despite his being from a rather orthodox Hindu family, forms the emotional core of the novel. Topi is a former sympathiser with the Hindu Mahasabha, who echoes anti-Muslim prejudices; yet, he is able to use humour to destabilise the certitudes of purists on both sides of the Hindi–Urdu language divide (including his friends, who insist on correct pronunciation of Urdu). This ambivalence and situation of in-betweenness makes him unacceptable to his family and compatriots at the university, who wish for unambiguous declarations of loyalty. His continued friendship with and closeness to his friend’s wife Sakeena, with whom he is accused of having an affair, eventually leads to his isolation and tragic suicide. Commensal taboos and the politics of language are at the heart of the novel’s concerns, as Raza candidly depicts prejudices and taboos relating to eating with Muslims in Hindu families, as well as snobbery as regards the ‘correct’ use of Urdu amongst Muslim families. The links between language, communal politics and the job market are underlined as well, as Topi fails to get a job teaching Hindi since he is from a ‘Muslim’ University. Eventually, the reinvention of the game of associating language with religious community proves to have fatal consequences for Topi. The afterlife of this aspect of communal politics that contributed to the partition is vividly dramatised in *Topi Shukla*, even though the novel does not represent the event directly.

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122 For a discussion of the growing acceptability of the communalisation of language in post-partition India and its effects on Urdu, see Aijaz Ahmad, ‘Some Reflections’, pp. 24–27.

123 Alok Rai’s discussion of the Hindi-Urdu divide is illuminating, and takes up the earlier history of British educational policy and state patronage of language. Rai discusses the consequent economic/social pressures stemming from the desire for government jobs for which knowledge of a particular language was a prerequisite, leading to exclusivist tendencies. See Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*. 
Rawalpindi Remembered: Communal Violence Then and Now

Bhisham Sahni, the author of *Tamas*, began writing the novel after a visit to Bhiwandi along with his brother Balraj Sahni, in the wake of the riots that took place there in 1971. As Sahni put it in an interview, the memory of the Partition experience came to the fore after witnessing the recurrence of such barbarity in independent India, which led him to reconstruct the memory of the Rawalpindi riots of early 1947. Sahni’s narrative thus constitutes an unusual instance of both primary and secondary witnessing in fictional form. In the discussion that follows I will focus on the novel’s negotiation of communal violence and the ironic use of types to portray character. I will also refer to historical accounts of the Rawalpindi riots that highlight the near-genocidal nature of massacres in the Punjab to further contextualise the novel’s representation of uncanny manifestations of such violence.

The novel begins with a episode in which Nathu, a Skinner of hides by trade, attempts for the first time to kill a pig, a scene in which the irreducible materiality of the pig’s existence is foregrounded, making the actual business of killing even more repulsive. The animal is represented as possessing a visceral reality,

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124 Bhisham Sahni (1915–2003) was born into an Arya Samaji family in Rawalpindi. He completed his Masters degree at the Government College Lahore, where he studied English literature. He became active in the work of the Indian National Congress while teaching at the local College in Rawalpindi. Sahni boarded one of the last trains to India from Pakistan, and after migration began to teach in Delhi at the Delhi College. His first collection of short stories, *Bhagyarekha (Line of Fate)*, was published in 1953. He worked as a translator in Moscow for seven years and resumed teaching after his return in 1963. He edited the literary journal, *Nai Kahaniyan* from 1965 to 1967, and began working on *Tamas* in 1971. The novel was published in 1974 and won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1976. Through his life Sahni was also associated with various causes, such as the struggle against communalism. See biographical note in *Tamas*.


defeating time and again his amateurish efforts to slaughter it. The scene takes on a symbolic dimension, as if enacting a nightmarish struggle with demons from the past. Nathu senses the disturbed atmosphere of the city but is not quite able to make sense of the scheme being set into motion by agent provocateurs like Murad Ali, who commissions him to slaughter the pig. Nathu is drawn unwittingly into the conspiracy, even as the pig is thrown at the steps of a mosque in order to incite communal violence. The causes of the outbreak of violence remain unintelligible to him, though he observes the sinister presence of Murad Ali at different junctures; Nathu is killed in the collective violence that follows.\footnote{\textcite{127} Sahni, \textit{Tamas}, p. 35.}

In the next episode, Congress activists who set out during the morning Prabhat Pheri to clean the city gutters fail to live up to Gandhian ideals that they declare as their creed.\footnote{\textcite{128} Sahni was part of the Congress and participated in such Prabhat Pheris or morning rituals at the time, while Jarnail was based on a real individual. See Bhalla, ‘The Landscape of Memories’, pp. 90–91, 116.} Given his experiences as a young Congress activist, Sahni later spoke of criticism of the Congress programme voiced by the party workers themselves and by Socialists within the Congress who were not adherents of Gandhi’s ideology.\footnote{\textcite{129} Bhalla, ‘The Landscape of Memories’, pp. 91, 103.} Another character somewhat reminiscent of Manto’s Toba Tek Singh, Jarnail the eccentric Sikh becomes a witness to this discrepancy between ideals and practice.\footnote{\textcite{130} Ravikant argues that Jarnail and Topi Shukla are direct fictional descendants of Manto’s Toba Tek Singh, as figures that embody a certain ‘mad’ rejection of dominant ideologies. Personal communication.} Muslim League followers confront the Congressmen and insist that the Congress cannot speak for Muslims. Indeed, they describe Maulana Azad as ‘the biggest dog of the Hindus, who goes wagging his tail before you’.\footnote{\textcite{131} Sahni, \textit{Tamas}, p. 34. Azad’s ideas as a ‘nationalist’ Muslim, come through powerfully in his memoir. See Azad, \textit{India Wins Freedom}.} The Congressmen are blocked from entering this street, where the League’s influence prevails. Nathu sees Murad Ali listening intently at this point.\footnote{\textcite{132} Sahni, \textit{Tamas}, p. 36.} Subsequently, stones are thrown in their direction on account of communal tension that arose after the dead pig was placed at the steps of the mosque. They are forced...
to make a hurried departure and Bakshiji says ‘It seems kites and vultures will hover over the town for a long time’. The vulnerability of the constructive work programme to disruption by communal violence (in this view, instigated by politicians like Murad Ali) is indicated in this episode.

Sahni brings in a new perspective in his portrait of the relationship between Liza and Richard, the deputy commissioner of the area. This sketch of a bored colonial officer’s wife and the sympathetic account of the deterioration of her marriage in an alien land functions as a counterpoint to the violence on the streets. Liza wonders whether there is any danger to her husband. She is reassured by his reply that the ruler is safe if the subjects fight among themselves. Liza and Richard are portrayed as types, although this is undercut to an extent through the compassion evoked for her situation of isolation. Later, Sahni is at his best while portraying the atmosphere of fear and growing anxiety amongst groups such as the Sanatan Dharm Sabha, which organise to combat the perceived threat, leading to the formation of a Volunteer Corps. Perhaps the most powerful sequences of the novel appear in the section portraying the indoctrination of Right-wing Hindu ideology in the Youth Wing. Ranvir, son of the Vanaprasthi or head priest of the sabha, is taught by his mentor Devvrat that the art of bomb making could be discovered in the Vedas; he is indoctrinated with hatred of the mlechchas or non-Hindus. Ranvir is then instructed to kill a hen without flinching as a rite of initiation. Later Inder, another young recruit, stabs an unsuspecting Muslim incense-seller.

133 Ibid., p. 70.
134 Ibid., pp. 50–54.
135 Ibid., p. 54.
136 Ranajit Guha draws attention to this aspect of imperial rule, with reference to memoirs that evoke this uncanny sense of isolation, of not being at home, in sensitive colonial administrators. He argues that isolation was a structural necessity of colonial rule. See Ranajit Guha, ‘Not at Home in Empire’ in Saurabh Dube ed. Postcolonial Passages, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp. 40–46. In the novel the administrator himself seems bereft of such a sense.
137 Sahni, Tamas, pp. 74–79.
138 Ibid., pp. 81–82.
139 Ibid., pp. 83–86.
as a way of proving his arrival in the group in a grim travesty of initiation rituals.\textsuperscript{140} The incense-seller fails to realise what is in store for him, the designated target of communal hatred. Here, the hyper-masculinity underpinning such joint actions of the militant Hindu group is disclosed without recourse to didactic commentary, an improvisation doubtless indebted to observation of the recrudescence of such groups in the 1960s and 70s. The economy of stereotypes that results in the construction of the ‘other’ is represented with savage irony and attention to detail.

The community leaders meet Deputy Commissioner Richard, who seeks to shift the blame for the situation onto the Indians. Finally the decision is taken to have the various leaders of different communities go around town appealing for peace so as to prevent large scale rioting.\textsuperscript{141} People express their fear of repetition of the communal riots of 1926.\textsuperscript{142} The rioting begins with arson and stray killings and grassroots communist worker Devdatt tries to ensure that a meeting takes place between Bakshiji of the Congress and Hayat Baksh of the Muslim League, even as his cadres fan out into the different riot-prone localities in order to try and mitigate the worst of violence.\textsuperscript{143} Jarnail addresses the public at large from different corners, admonishing them for the outbreak of violence. ‘Whimsical as he had always been, he set out to quell the riots, marching military style, with the cane tucked under his arm’.\textsuperscript{144} However, he is struck from behind on the head and killed. Jarnail becomes a tragic victim of the politics of hatred. His death indicates the vulnerability of pacifists following Gandhi’s lead who continued to risk all to achieve communal amity at a time in which an intensification of violence seemed to render old-fashioned anti-communalism ineffectual.\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., pp. 202–3. Also see the incisive discussion of this episode in Bhalla, ‘Memory, History’, pp. 3122–23.

\textsuperscript{141} Sahni, \textit{Tamas}, pp. 92–197.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p. 118.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., pp. 161–62, 188. Sahni modelled this character on a friend teaching at his college whom he liked, despite not being convinced by his ideology. He is also critical of the support extended by the Communist Party of India to the demand for Pakistan. See Bhalla, ‘The Landscape of Memories’, pp. 105–6.

\textsuperscript{144} Sahni, \textit{Tamas}, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., pp. 189–91.
There is a powerful dramatisation of the impact of growing communal polarisation on the psyche of individuals who otherwise may have no real communal bias, as in the incident in which Shah Nawaz kicks the servant Milkhi downstairs to his death. Shah Nawaz, a friend of Raghu Nath, is asked to bring Nath’s wife’s jewellery back from their house, which they had left in Milkhi’s care due to the threat of violence. The afterlife of earlier episodes of collective violence has a phantasmal presence, taking possession of Shah Nawaz through the medium of sound, and precipitating his irrational attack on an innocent person. For it is the sound of mourning nearby that triggers this random killing on the part of a man who otherwise had no grouse or animosity against the servant in front of him.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 172–78.} This episode has an element of the uncanny to it, given the lack of causal logic leading up to the killing. Rather, there is a revelation that a catastrophic breakdown of social and moral norms may unleash an unexpected capacity for viciousness in almost anyone. It also becomes clear in this episode that communal polarisation was not the only motivating factor for much of the violence during the partition.

Sahni highlights the capacity of ordinary folk to resist the spread of communal feeling as well. Rajo defends the fleeing Sikh Harnam Singh and his wife when they take refuge in her home (Sahni himself would later sensitively play the role of Harnam Singh in the film version of \textit{Tamas}). The petty looting and greed rampant at this time is described here and it is the Muslim woman Rajo who proves to be strong enough to resist the propensity for revenge and retaliation exhibited by those around her.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 253–71.} Later, community-based notions of purity and honour lead Sikh women to sacrifice themselves by throwing themselves down a well, rather than face the prospect of capture and violation by the enemy, as in the incident at Thoa Khalsa.\footnote{In Sheikhpura, two wells in the Namdhari Gurudwara were filled with bodies of Hindu and Sikh women who had committed suicide to save themselves from assault after violence on 25–26 August, 1947, a little after the period depicted here. See Talbot, \textit{Pakistan}, p. 104. See Sahni, \textit{Tamas}, pp. 291–95. For first-person accounts of the Thoa Khalsa incident, see Butalia, \textit{Other Side of Silence}, especially pp. 150–74.} However, this collective suicide is depicted as irrational,
given that the fear of a Muslim attack is exaggerated and that this ‘self-sacrifice’ turns out to be unnecessary.

Towards the end of the novel, after the large-scale communal conflagration, some attempt is made to attend to the plight of refugees. Recriminations begin amongst leaders at the local level. During this meeting, Gandhi’s views on the policy of divide and rule are put forward to explain the reasons for the communal rioting that had devastated the township. This serves only to underline the inadequacy of the explanation; Manohar Lal, an activist, accuses such people of being Gandhi’s parrots, mindlessly repeating what he stated in Wardha. The British administration is not let off the hook either. This becomes clear in the portrait of the relationship between Richard and his wife Lisa, as well as through the depiction of the unfeeling quality of Richard’s response to deaths in the area under his charge. Richard speaks of the need for detachment as an official; he remains incapable of empathy with those who are suffering despite retaining a pseudo-scholarly interest in India’s past, ironically as an amateur collector of Buddhist icons and relics.

In 1938, during a talk given to Khudai Khidmatgars, followers of Badshah Khan, Gandhi recalled the repentance of Mir Alam Khan, the Pathan who had attacked him in South Africa:

‘This could not have happened if I had retaliated. My action can be fitly described as a process of conversion. Unless you have felt within you this urge to convert your enemy by your love, you had better retrace your steps; this business of non-violence is not for you.... Renunciation of violence must not mean apathy or helplessness in the face of

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150 Ibid., p. 307. Sahni later acknowledged that groups within the Congress were not above ridiculing one another, and conceded that his occasionally ironical views on Gandhi as projected in the novel were not identical to his views as a young man. Rather, these were the reflections of a personal intellectual struggle with Gandhi’s ideas in later life. See Bhalla, ‘The Landscape of Memories’, pp. 103–6. Amin’s discussion of the various uses the Gandhi name and ‘sign’ could be put to is illuminating in this regard. See Amin, Event, Metaphor, Memory, p. 171.

151 Sahni, Tamas, pp. 312–14.
wrongdoing. If our non-violence is genuine and rooted in love, it ought to provide a more effective remedy against wrongdoing than the use of brute force'.

The novel ends with an attempt to form a peace committee, as the leaders of various denominations again tour the riot-hit city seeking to propagate the message of peace. In a chilling twist, we find the sinister figure of Murad Ali leading the slogan shouting, even as the temporary cessation of violence allows the city to gradually limp back to normalcy. The very obverse of Gandhian ideals has thus come to be realised, with the politics of hatred appropriating even the rhetoric of the pacifists.

Raghavan Iyer makes an interesting point about societies in which notions of shame and perfectibility rather than guilt and sin are deeply rooted, which is relevant in this regard. As he suggests, a society in which the heroic ideal is kept alive by national folklore is one in which people may respect goodness more than anything else and respond to it, even though they may themselves falling below high moral standards. Yet, given that they expect so much from their leaders who may be found to be wanting in the face of such high standards, they may begin to distrust such leaders and this may become responsible for the rapid spread of cynicism and demoralisation. Iyer argues that India had become so demoralised by the time Gandhi entered the political scene that his heroic appeal to the forgotten language of tradition produced results, but not for long, as he discovered to his cost. Indeed, by the end of his life even he had lost his faith in the readiness of the Indian people in regard to ahimsa. The novel’s ending confirms the cogency of this argument.

The action of Sahni’s novel, we may presume, takes place during the Rawalpindi violence of March 1947 that preceded the horrific massacres between August 1947 and January 1948. As Anders Hansen shows, the violence of this phase was of a qualitatively

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153 Sahni, Tamas, p. 351.
155 Ibid., pp. 382–83.
different kind; an unprecedented number of casualties took place in March.\textsuperscript{156} The Sikhs especially suffered heavy losses and the feeling of being unprepared beset them, combined with a desire for retaliation. Hansen quotes later official figures to the effect that 3000 were killed and 1200 seriously injured, indicating the genocidal intent of the perpetrators.\textsuperscript{157} He emphasises the role of former soldiers from the Indian British army who returned from the Second World War only to find unemployment. Private armies filled this vacuum and offered stability in a fast-changing political scenario. Out-of-work soldiers thus provided professional expertise to amateur groups. The army style organisational setup and the frequent use of military weaponry further illustrate the military connection. The members of such community-based armies increased significantly during March. According to British officials, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh membership reached 50,400, and the Muslim League National Guard 38,467, as both armed their volunteers. One of the Sikh bodies, the Akal Saina, had in March obtained 4,600 new members, and the total membership was 6,600.\textsuperscript{158} They were along with the other Akali regiments expected to join arms with the RSS against Muslims. An official report stated that ‘The unity prevailing between the two communities on the subject of an anti-Muslim front is now virtually complete and the two volunteer organisations can be expected to act as one’.\textsuperscript{159} Such private armies extended their legitimacy as defenders of the community, even as violence entered the personal realm and made it more difficult for people to avoid the fighting as they were attacked simply on account of their religious affiliation. The Rawalpindi massacres thus led to an even stronger sense of polarisation between the communities.

As Hansen’s account demonstrates, there was more to the Rawalpindi events than the extremism and opportunism of the Muslim League leaders; the RSS and the Akalis’ efforts at mobilisation and stockpiling of weaponry were equally important.\textsuperscript{160} During this phase of ‘production’ of Hindu/Sikh–Muslim violence in Punjab, an institutionalised riot system was set into place in

\textsuperscript{156} Hansen, \textit{Partition and Genocide}, pp. 107–27.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., p. 118.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., pp. 118–19.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., pp. 118–19.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., pp. 124–25.
which specialists such as the demobilised soldiers on both sides played a role in creating the conditions for what followed.\textsuperscript{161} Given the conditions of fear and near mass hysteria that the advent of the partition created and as the logic of holding minority populations as hostages in the two nation states became acceptable, the genocidal intent was given free rein.\textsuperscript{162} Ethnic cleansing and pogroms followed along with honour killings, as communities sought to protect the chastity of their womenfolk. Hansen’s analysis allows us to grasp the salience of Sahni’s narrative as an unsettling ‘fictive’ mode of witnessing the moment when the violence in the Punjab took a genocidal turn. The narrative also conveys a sense of the incomprehension of bureaucrats and the government as regards this turn of events.

Towards the end, the ‘Statistics Babu’, the government-appointed relief officer, catalogues the losses of the refugees, both human and in terms of property after communal rioting. ‘I want figures, only figures, nothing but figures. Why don’t you understand? You start narrating an endless tale of woe and suffering. I am not here to listen to the whole “Ramayana”. Give me figures—how many dead, how many wounded, how much loss of property and goods. That is all’.\textsuperscript{163} There is a disjunction between his role as impersonal representative of the administrative machinery, noting information gleaned from victims in given categories in the appropriate form and as the unwilling listener confronted by personal tragedies. The Babu also encounters the occasional inability to grieve that characterises the behaviour of victims. The procedures of relief and rehabilitation and the logic of getting on with life seem to preoccupy the attention of the survivors at times in such a way as to preclude mourning. Such insensitivity may be a by-product of bureaucratic indifference towards individual grief and suffering, for which there

\textsuperscript{161} Paul Brass sets these terms forth in an analytical framework applicable to the study of riots and pogroms during communal violence in India. See Brass, \textit{The Production of Hindu–Muslim Violence in Contemporary India}, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 5–39.

\textsuperscript{162} Azad wrote of his shock at hearing about the theory that the minorities would stand as hostages for the well being of minorities in the other country after the partition. He attributed the extent of violence to this sentiment of ‘hostages’ and ‘retaliation’. See Azad, \textit{India Wins Freedom}, p. 216.

\textsuperscript{163} Sahni, \textit{Tamas}, p. 316.
seems to be no language available in the aftermath of collective violence.\footnote{164} It is as if mourning remains an unfinished task for such survivors. In the Babu’s response we also get a sense of the inability to listen to testimony that often characterised the official response to traumatised survivors.\footnote{165} Indeed, modern technologies of government in which statistics played a crucial role were extensively deployed during this phase, especially in relation to the repatriation of abducted women, as Pandey demonstrates.\footnote{166}

Sahni’s novel thus presents witness-figures embedded in specific community locations at this historical moment, not quite able to piece the puzzle together. This might only be possible from a later vantage point, when the witnessing of another moment of communal violence leads the imagination back through time. However, in Sahni’s attempt to depict collective violence and the forces working behind the scenes in a realistic/naturalistic mode the balance at times tilts towards a somewhat deterministic view of human behaviour.\footnote{167} The episodic form of narration features characters whose fate is divulged without detailed description as in the case of Nathu, who we are told, almost as if in parenthesis, is killed during communal violence. The different witness-figures embody the collective failure to come to terms with complicity and collusion in near-genocidal violence, requiring readers to bring to bear their own experience of contradictions in political processes. This may perhaps lead the reader in the direction of the kind of activist intervention that Sahni himself embodied in numerous campaigns. Indeed, his ironic representation of the modalities of indoctrination amongst the Hindu right led to a major controversy, after the screening of

\footnote{164} Ibid., pp. 322–24.\footnote{165} For a moving discussion of the vicissitudes of listening, with reference to Holocaust survivors, see Dori Laub, ‘Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening’, in Laub and Felman eds. Testimony, pp. 57–74.\footnote{166} Pandey, Remembering Partition, pp. 167–68.\footnote{167} It is almost as if the author attempts to narrativise the Rawalpindi violence with a film aesthetic in mind, drawing on the techniques of the new wave in Indian cinema. Roy’s analysis of Sahni’s story Pali has a bearing on this section of the argument. See Anuradha M. Roy, ‘Pali and Communalism Today’ in Ravikant and Saint eds. Translating Partition, p. 115.
the film version of *Tamas* by Govind Nihalani on national T.V. in 1988.\(^{168}\) It is, however, through its evocation of uncanny aftereffects of collective violence that the novel provides testimony to not only the macabre occurrences during the massacres at the time, but also its afterlife. The spreading and infiltration of such ‘normalised’ violence into various spheres of civil society, besides political society, is one such aspect of this afterlife, sensitively depicted in this major Hindi novel.

**Masculinist Anxieties and Wounded Selves**

Sahni’s sympathetic yet critical treatment of Gandhian ideas may be contrasted with a novel in English, *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) by Manohar Malgonkar.\(^{169}\) Malgonkar’s novel incorporates aspects of colonial history leading up to the partition, told in a somewhat racy style. As Meenakshi Mukherjee shows, the novel is panoramic in scope and ambition; the plot centres on the fortunes of two characters, Gyan Talwar, from peasant stock, and Debidayal, heir of a business magnate.\(^{170}\) Towards the latter half of the novel, there is an attempt to connect the effects of colonialism to violence in pre-partition India. In chapter 30, the Hindu Mahasabhaite, Basu, speaks of the way in which what had been aimed against the British turned against itself, breeding the ugliest forms of distrust.\(^{171}\)

\(^{168}\) For a discussion of the contentious reception of the film, see Ravikant in Ravikant and Saint eds. *Translating Partition*, pp. 162–64. Also see Dilip Simeon’s account of the volatile mood on campus during a visit by Sahni to address students at Ramjas College in Delhi during the time *Tamas* was being broadcast on national television, ‘Venue for a Speech on *Tamas*’, pp. 51–60. For a critical discussion of the film as an adaptation of the novel, see Ranjani Mazumdar, ‘Memory and History’.

\(^{169}\) Born in 1913, Manohar Malgonkar completed B.A. degrees in English and Sanskrit, then worked as a hunting guide and after a few years became a conservationist. Malgonkar joined the army and after a decade in the forces eventually settled down to a career as a farmer and writer. See biographical note in Malgonkar’s *The Devil’s Wind*, New Delhi, Penguin, 1972 (rpt 1988).


rejects the suggestion by Debidayal that non-violence may be the only answer. Basu feels that *ahimsa* was an effective weapon against the British because of their ‘decency’, but asks the rhetorical question as regards whether non-violence might have been effective against Hitler. For him the Congress movement has ultimately led to people becoming emasculated, which the Hindu Mahasabha was seeking to remedy. Basu underlines the need for army men to possess a fighting spirit, which according to him could never be in a society nurtured with non-violence as the governing principle. He points to the ravaged face of his wife on whom acid had been thrown, observing that she is in the least concerned whether he will take revenge for what had been done to her and is rather concerned with the fact that Basu had not eaten his food. He sarcastically remarks that she personifies non-violent ‘mother India’. We may be reminded here of Ashis Nandy’s citation of three interrelated fantasies, of the nation as Suffering Mother, of the nation as Omnipotent Mother and that of the nation as projection of infantile narcissism and his analysis of the way such projection helps the religious impulse find expression in the ideology of nationalism.

Here the figure of the maimed wife also represents the nation as suffering mother; Basu rationalises the instrumental use of violent reprisals in the name of nationalism.

Basu’s assertion of the incalculable damage caused to the ‘Hindu’ self is also symptomatic of the rhetoric of militant Hindu nationalism prevalent during this phase. The sexual stereotypes of the emasculated Hindu seeking to reclaim his virility in the face of the threat of the potent Muslim form a dyad, represented in the novel by Basu and Shafi. The ideas represented here are characteristic of the syndrome of perceived emasculation felt by many in

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172 Ibid., p. 299.
173 Ibid., pp. 299–301.
the wake of the colonial experience. Hence, the compensatory hyper-masculinity expressed here, tilting towards a legitimising of counter-violence and a rationalisation of ethnic cleansing. Gandhi’s alternative philosophy of change and inclusive views are presented summarily in this account, reminding us again of the validity of Iyer’s earlier cited analysis. Although there is an implicit note of criticism in the depiction of Basu and his outburst, his viewpoint gains limited credence in the way in which the large-scale violence that followed the departure of the British is represented in the novel. Furthermore, there is an element of the lurid about the depiction of violence against women in the novel. Unlike the restraint observed by some of the writers we have already discussed, there is an emphasis on visceral aspects of violence. The villainous Muslim Shafi is ultimately killed by Sundari who beats his head in with a Shiva idol before attempting to flee from West Punjab, while still in the house of the Hindu landlord Tekchand. Violence is presented as both seductive and repulsive and its effects are manifested in such episodes marked by fantasy projection (the image of the Muslim as rapist) and overindulgence in blood and gore. The chords of myth and melodrama are plucked in clichéd ways, ultimately hemmed in by the limitations of the author’s artistic vision and ideology. We may contrast such a problematic and at times biased mode of witnessing to Manto’s best stories in which a radically different and unsettling treatment of sexual stereotypes and communal violence can be discerned, as I will show in Chapter Five.

An earlier novel by Malgonkar, The Distant Drum, while mainly a novel about army life, does refer to the Delhi riots during the partition and joint efforts by two friends in the army from different communities, protagonist Kiran Garud and Abdul Jamal, to bring succour to victims. In an incident in which such masculinist anxieties appear to a lesser extent, Abdul rescues his friend from

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176 Sudhir Kakar’s observations about the humiliation felt by those with a consciousness of defeat in the colonial encounter, and the turn towards identification with the aggressor or towards revivalism that may follow are pertinent in this regard. See Kakar, The Colours of Violence. New Delhi, Penguin, 1995 (rpt 1996), p. 188.


178 For an insightful critique of Malgonkar’s ideological outlook, see Mukherjee, Twice Born Fiction, pp. 68–70.
a Muslim mob when Kiran confronts a would-be Muslim rapist in a mosque in old Delhi. The emphasis is rather on loyalties of friends remaining intact amidst the holocaust. Finally though, as the armies are divided and war breaks out in Kashmir, with the two facing each other in opposed battalions, friendship must be left behind as nationalist imperatives and pragmatism prevail. Indeed, Kiran nearly faces a court-martial for meeting Abdul one last time on a peak in no-man’s land on the day the ceasefire is declared. ‘There was no room in the soldiers’ code for divided loyalties. His debt to Abdul was a private debt’.

The code of loyalty to one’s army and nation are represented as inflexible in the wake of the partition, excluding any possibility of contrarian agency for ‘disciplined’ soldiers.

Pronounced anxieties about masculinity and castration appear in Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* in the description of the plight of the family of Lala Kanshi Ram in the town of Sialkot after June 1947. For example, during the forced migration across the border, young refugee boys visit the townships around and attempt to pass themselves off as Muslims. One of them, Suraj Prakash, teaches the protagonist Arun how to fold the foreskin of the penis in order to pretend that he is circumcised. This novel too represents violence in a visceral and graphic and, at times, predictable way in its depiction of travails faced by refugee convoys, attacked during the journey across the border. The fear of loss of women’s honour, of rape by Muslims and the impact of this anxiety on such Hindu

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180 Ibid., p. 231. As Mukherjee argues, this episode is rendered without sentimentality, given Kiran’s later sense of the futility of displaying emotion in this situation. See Mukherjee, *Twice Born Fiction*, p. 59.

181 This theme is explored with a greater degree of irony in Manto’s story ‘Aakhri Salute’ (trans. ‘The Last Salute’).

182 Chaman Nahal (1927) has written nine novels, four of which constitute *The Gandhi Quartet*. He taught English Literature for many years in India and abroad. Nahal’s family migrated at the time of the partition from Sialkot; much of the narrative is based on personal experience. Nahal, however, composed the novel much after the event. Biographical details from the note and Introduction in Nahal, *Azadi*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1975 (rpt 2001), pp. xi–xv.

families is foregrounded in the narrative, seemingly based on memories of traumatic experiences not adequately reflected upon.

For though there is an acknowledgement of what is being done to the Muslims in India and an admission of equality of guilt on both sides, it is the trauma undergone by Lala Kanshi Ram’s family that drives the narrative, especially after the death of his daughter and Arun’s sister Madhu. Violence against Muslims, in contrast, is not described in similar detail, though as Talbot points out, its coarsening effects on the aggressors is illustrated in the depiction of the moral disintegration of Abdul Ghani, the Lala’s neighbour. In a gesture towards ending the cycle of violence the Lala does say that he cannot hate Muslims any more and wishes for their forgiveness; however, his wife Prabha Rani promises to hate and curse them as long as she lives. The novel concludes with a sense of irremediable damage being done to personal/familial integrity, expressed primarily in the breakdown of communication between the protagonist and his father. Erotic daydreams about the idealised figure Sunanda, who had lost her husband in the violence ultimately fail to provide solace to Arun at the end. Such idealised images of femininity (once again, the nation is figured as the suffering mother) no longer suffice as adequate sources of personal solace/redemption. The pervasive numbing and waning of affect that afflicted many refugees may underlie this depiction, limiting the potential for a recalibration of perceptions in the wake of the ordeal.

Indeed, it is as if the novel’s protagonist is reduced to narcissistic regard of his wounds. There is no sense here, as Priyamvada Gopal suggests with reference to Manto’s representations of masculinity in crisis, that masculinity itself might need to be radically reconstituted in the light of the partition experience for any meaningful societal transformation to take place. As Gopal argues, Manto

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184 Ibid., pp. 147, 299–300. Nahal refers to the loss of his own sister, who was killed on a train during the forced migration. See Introduction to Azadi, p. xiii. In the novel, the abduction of Madhu from a train is reported, rather than dramatised. (see Nahal, Azadi, pp. 146–47).


186 Nahal, Azadi, pp. 299–300.

187 Ibid., p. 327.

188 Gopal, Literary Radicalism, p. 105.
was driven to the conclusion that for the horrors of 1947–48 not to repeat themselves, reformation had to occur not merely in the behaviour and attitudes but in terms of a far-reaching transformation wrought from an engagement with contradictions in the self.¹⁸⁹ Rather, the novel replicates the state of wounded selfhood and despair of refugees, falling back on conventional images of alienation and angst. Deeper contradictions in the constitution of masculine identity in Punjab are not engaged with, however. There is little formal experimentation either; the narrative follows a pattern of linear, realist narration. The lapses of insight and empathy weaken the rendering of traumatic historical events that may have been personally witnessed as a child.

Civilisational Memory in the Wake of Migration

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of Basti (1979 trans. 1999), a novel by Pakistani writer Intizar Husain.¹⁹⁰ In an interview with Alok Bhalla, while reflecting on the partition, Husain admits his bewilderment and inability to explain the extent and magnitude

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁹⁰ Intizar Husain was born into an orthodox Shi’ite family, given that his father and uncle were recent converts to Shi’ism, while the rest of the family remained Sunni Muslims. Husain’s father was somewhat of a Maulvi and a proselytiser. He wished his son to be educated in the traditional way, and hence Husain received his early education at home in his native Dibai, a town in the district Bulandshahr in India, under his father. This included a study of Arabic and mainly religious texts, though amongst the Urdu books he read was the Arabian Nights, a book that later had a great influence on his fiction. The family moved to the larger town of Hapur. Husain went to school there and eventually went to Meerut for his college education. His college career was brought to an end by the partition in 1947, when he was deeply disturbed by the levels of violence around him. He migrated to Lahore, where his family later joined him. He began a long and illustrious literary career with the story Qayyuma ki Dukan (Qayyuma’s Shop). The discussion that follows is indebted to Memon’s Introduction in Husain, Basti, pp. vii–xx.
of the violence that occurred.\textsuperscript{191} Even so, through his narratives Husain has made a lifelong attempt to make the experience of migration meaningful, often figuring this quest in terms of retrieval of memory. He began writing short stories after migrating to Pakistan, though not in the mode advocated by the Progressive writers.\textsuperscript{192} Rather, he probed deeper into the past and ancient traditions and legends; initially the history of the Muslim migration, the \textit{hegira} or \textit{hijrat} and later the \textit{Mahabharata} and other subcontinental narratives about devastation and exile.\textsuperscript{193} Husain began to examine the Indian Muslim culture that he felt he was a product of and that had shaped the history of which he was a part. In his view, an ongoing cultural process had developed a cultural and creative amalgam, as a result of an attempt to understand the Islamic revelation in terms of this land and to merge the revelation with the soil. But this amalgamation had been threatened by the puritan frame of mind amongst both Hindus and Muslims.\textsuperscript{194}

Along with his friend the poet Nasir Kazmi, Husain attempted to initiate a literary movement that would usher in a new consciousness.\textsuperscript{195} At first he hoped that the experience of emigration would be a source of creativity and growth in the life of the new nation. He sought to turn the temporal event of the Prophet Muhammad’s \textit{hijrat} from Mecca to Medina in 622 C. E. into an archetypal event of


\textsuperscript{192} Memon argues that Husain was influenced by the Progressives during the first phase of his career as a writer, but fell out with them because of their failure to acknowledge the reality of Pakistan. Some Progressive critics dubbed his work reactionary on account of the nostalgia for the past they discerned in it. See Memon, ‘Partition Literature: A Study of Intizar Husain’, \textit{Modern Asian Studies} 14 (1980): pp. 397–401.

\textsuperscript{193} The following paragraphs draws on Memon’s account. See Memon, \textit{Introduction Basti}, pp. xvii–xix.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., p. xviii.

\textsuperscript{195} Kazmi was born in Ambala in undivided India, and migrated to Lahore. For details about Kazmi’s literary career, see the biographical note in Farooqi, ed. \textit{Oxford India Anthology of Modern Urdu Literature: Poetry and Prose Miscellany}, pp. 50–51.
renewal, an epiphany that could enact itself again and again across time and history. However, Husain came to fear the collective loss of memory, since he felt that at times great experiences come to be lost to a nation and that nations come to forget their history. In his opinion, the experience of emigration was thus lost to the mohajir community. Husain’s disillusionment was confirmed by failures of the Pakistani state, with suppression of democracy, removal of civilian government and the taking over of power by military dictators such as Field Marshal Ayub Khan in 1958. Later events such as the defeat during the 1965 war with India and the 1971 civil war that led to the division of Pakistan confirmed this sense of failed potential. Given that religion had failed to be the bond that could keep people united and that society had not been regenerated, there was a pronounced sense of loss of memory and collective identity. For Husain the implications of this partitioning of consciousness could prove to be disastrous.

Husain adopts a complex literary strategy in Basti, combining retrospective narration with a storyline set in a later phase of history. The protagonist Zakir is a historian who looks back to the events of his early childhood in India and the partition from the vantage point of the experience of 1971 in Pakistan as a dual witness to momentous events, past and present.

His memories of childhood in village India are not merely nostalgic in the representation of commonality of experience between the communities and the tales and stories that formed the bedrock of a shared culture. For there is an early reference to Cain’s murder of Abel; this episode becomes a key to understanding the potential for discord within

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197 Bodh Prakash argues that the novel can be divided into two parts. The first part portrays Zakir’s memories of childhood in Rupnagar, while the second reflects on the community’s past, going back to prehistory and mythic times. Images from nature, seasonal rhythms and images of innocence and continuity characterise the first part, while images of loss, desolation, waste and meaninglessness predominate in the second. The second part follows a stream-of-consciousness structure, in which events are recorded through the principle of association rather than chronology as the narrator moves between ages. The two parts are united by the image of the basti, the small town or neighbourhood, with different connotations including that of Pakistan, a basti as failed utopia. See Prakash, ‘Nation and Identity’, p. 86.
the family, or within such modes of intercommunity coexistence in ‘bastis’ or neighbourhoods.\textsuperscript{198} As in \textit{Twilight in Delhi}, a plague afflicts Hindus and Muslims alike in the village Rupnagar in undivided India. The young Zakir observes that Hindus are dying in larger numbers. He is told that when the plague comes, Hindus die, while when cholera comes, Muslims die. But the disease soon ceases to discriminate and even the doctor’s wife is taken by the plague.\textsuperscript{199} Such memories of the spread of contagion, which take on a metaphoric quality, are interspersed with an awareness of demonstrations taking place with the advent of the movement for freedom of the eastern part of Pakistan, which would later become Bangladesh. His father Abba Jan compares demonstrations against this movement unfavourably with those that took place at the time of the Khilafat movement.\textsuperscript{200} The poignancy of departing from the land of one’s childhood memories is powerfully evoked. It was as if, as Zakir puts it, a whole mythic era had stayed behind with Rupnagar.\textsuperscript{201} Husain dramatises the psychological costs of loss of one’s homeland and the resultant sense of alienation with sensitivity, also giving us a sense of psychic numbing that followed physical dislocation.\textsuperscript{202}

The novel also captures the impact of the historical trauma of 1947 at the level of perception of time. In \textit{Basti} time is not always presented as a linear succession of past, present and future, given that the black hole of 1947 led to a disturbance of temporality and the sense of continuity. There is rather a sense of blocked or frozen time here, as well as an attempt to reach back into sacred/durational time to initiate the possibility of recuperation. Marianne Hirsch’s notion of post-memory, a form of memory transmitted by survivors of traumatic events to their children, is pertinent with respect to the novel. Hirsch writes of holes in the memory of survivors of the Holocaust and their children and the ways in which trauma

\textsuperscript{198} Husain, \textit{Basti}, pp. 6–7.

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., pp. 12–13.

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., pp. 22–23.

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., p. 36.

\textsuperscript{202} As Lifton points out, psychic numbing may result in immobilisation in extreme cases as there is an inward struggle to absorb and confront what has happened. See Caruth, ‘An Interview with Robert Jay Lifton’, pp. 136–37.
may be passed on through either discussion of horrific events, or even refraining from, overt reference. For her, later stories may be evacuated by such narratives of a previous generation that circulate belatedly and are shaped by traumatic events that can neither be recreated nor understood.\textsuperscript{203} Husain is able to grasp the belated effects of historical trauma on later generations in Pakistan, especially in terms of such holes in memory. He makes a conscious effort to restore a sense of the Indo-Islamic cultural amalgam, as well as other strands in the civilisation of the subcontinent that had been deemed ‘other’ by official nationalist ideologies in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{204} Indeed, the possibility of coming to terms with such gaps in the collective memory was further complicated due to the historical circumstances of the 1960s leading to the break-up of Pakistan. This narrative generates different modes of representation of discontinuity, shifting between the late 1960s/early 1970s during Ayub Khan’s rule, 1947, the 1857 revolt and the events during the hijrat. Husain traverses the fractured landscape of exile and post-memory through recourse to symbolism and myth, as well as sustained reflection on lost modes of civilisational being and exchange in bastis or neighbourhoods.

There is a retrospective description of how as a student Zakir observed demonstrations during the Quit India movement along with his Hindu friend Surendar, and how he began to come to terms with his sexuality with his attraction for his childhood sweetheart Sabirah (whose name means patience).\textsuperscript{205} Later, at a time when teaching is disrupted at the college in Pakistan where he lectures, a letter from Surendar in India brings news about Sabirah, who had stayed behind in India.\textsuperscript{206} The theme of unrequited love and the longing to be reunited with the love of his youth recurs through the narrative. Zakir misses the neem trees that do not flourish


\textsuperscript{204} Contravening the ‘Pakistan ideology’ could even lead to a jail sentence, though this law was not often implemented. Personal communication, Mubarak Ali.

\textsuperscript{205} Husain, \textit{Basti}, pp. 41–42 and 47.

\textsuperscript{206} Ibid., p. 137.
in the harsher climate in the northwest; these become a symbol of lost time.\textsuperscript{207} Zakir’s friends meet at the restaurant at the hotel Shiraz, where a young radical spouting Marxist rhetoric denounces imperialism and welcomes the possibility of smashing of the system, which the war symbolised for him.\textsuperscript{208} Here we find a satirical representation of over-the-top revolutionary posturing. There is even a question as regards whether the creation of Pakistan itself was a good thing or not; finally the reply is that doubt must be suspended at some point.\textsuperscript{209} As Memon argues, Husain eventually accepted the partition as a historical necessity, while recognising its tragic outcome.\textsuperscript{210}

Surendar describes to him in his letter Sabirah’s fate as a silent, melancholy girl staying on alone in India. She had decided to stay, Zakir learns, after having been offered a position at All India Radio, even as her mother and sister set off for Dhaka. When asked by Surendar what might have happened if she had set off for Pakistan as well, she refuses to speculate on paths not taken. Zakir begins to feel that his position is similar to Sabirah’s.\textsuperscript{211} Indeed, her situation begins to preoccupy him more than the fate of independent Pakistan and the possibility of another partition of his country. He is unable to reply to his friend’s letter or make any decision about Sabirah after the announcement of war breaking out.\textsuperscript{212} The failure to act on this desire acquires a symbolic significance, indicating the long-reaching effects of paralysis of will in both the personal and geopolitical realms.

Section seven is constructed in the form of a diary narrativising some of the important dates during the civil war. In a nightmarish vision, Zakir takes on the identity of Abul Hasan of \textit{The Thousand and One Nights} and wanders through a city of men without heads, which terrifies him.\textsuperscript{213} The diary entry for December 16 (also the day the Indian army entered Dhaka, assuring the birth of Bangladesh) is interwoven with references to the 1857 revolt and the looting

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., p. 96.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., p. 124.
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., p. 130.
\textsuperscript{210} Memon, ‘Partition Literature’, p. 410.
\textsuperscript{211} Husain, \textit{Basti}, pp. 137–44.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., p. 151.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., p. 176–77.
of the city of Delhi after the revolt. The telescoping of different moments of devastation and collective despair does allow to an extent for a resonance with earlier historical trauma to evolve. However, there may also be a tendency here to collapse discrete historical moments into a universalised account of suffering to achieve a sense of meaning through destined suffering for the community.

The narrative takes a critical look at the usage of the rhetoric of religiosity in war mobilisation in section eight as Zakir observes a poster depicting a man on horseback with the sword in his hand and a bloodthirsty face with the slogan ‘these fighters for the faith, these your mysterious servants’. The picture provokes no response: it was dead for him, as were the words. A little further he sees a car passing with a sticker that says, ‘Crush India’. This banal slogan too has no meaning for him, even as he is overpowered by numbness. The vacuity of such invocations of identity based on mythic conceptions of the heroic past, or premised on demonising the common enemy, becomes self-evident. Indeed, the foundational myth of Pakistan, as Talbot puts it, in the official reading still maintains that the Muslims of the subcontinent were a separate nation from their Hindu neighbours. The Pakistan demand and the logic for the partition were based on this two-nation theory. As Talbot shows, during the celebrations of Jinnah’s 85th birth anniversary in December 1961 a Majlis-i-Istiqal-i-Pakistan (Committee for Independence of Pakistan) meeting in Lahore

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215 This tendency becomes pronounced in Husain’s later comments on his attempt to make the experience of migration meaningful for Pakistani mohajirs. Husain suggests that the experience of the partition, of exile and migration is not unique, but is rather part of the civilisational memory of the subcontinent, in terms of what people have experienced since the days of the Ramayana or the Mahabharata (see Husain, ‘Partition, Exile’, pp. 248–50). In this remark in an interview, the need to recast the meaning of the partition in terms of the language of the epic, or religious precedents such as the hijrat, seems to lead a loss of historical specificity with respect to 1947 and the new forms of near-genocidal violence witnessed then.
216 Husain, Basti, p. 194.
217 Ibid., p. 194.
218 Talbot, Pakistan, pp. 4–5.
unanimously resolved that the committee should list those who had opposed Jinnah and the Pakistan movement during the period 1940–46, and that anti-Pakistan elements should be deprived of the rights of political expression, that they should be debarred from seeking election to any future Parliament of government and that a ceiling should be imposed on their property. This sowed the seeds for a political culture of intolerance, which became the hallmark of successive elected as well as non-elected regimes. In its wake, curbing civil liberties and selective political accountability, as well as violence in the absence of a consensual and accommodationist political culture came to be considered acceptable. This encouraged military intervention under the pretext of restoring law and order. Ethnic stereotyping and the politics of language manifested in the imposition of Urdu as the official language on Bengali-speakers led to the eventual breakaway of Bangladesh from Pakistan. This was also a response to the hegemonic position of the Punjabi dominated state and military under Yahya Khan that culminated in genocide in the East (resisted by the Mukti Bahini) after the refusal to accept the results of the 1971 elections. Husain’s narrative seeks to restore compassion and kindness that had been lost at this time when few in the west were even aware of the atrocities committed in the east by the Pakistan army. Indeed, such erasure of collective memory could be traced back to an earlier period when the massacres during the partition became a taboo subject.

Furthermore, the difficulty of dealing with defeat and disillusionment with nationalist ideals comes to the fore in Zakir’s conversations with his friend Afzal, a character perhaps modelled on the real-life figure of Nasir Kazmi. Afzal makes a show of mock-bravado in declaring that he could make Pakistan beautiful again, given that the ugly ones have spoiled the face of Pakistan. Even the flowers have been growing fewer; due to this people have been growing ugly and hatred has spread. He states his desire to plant roses and

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219 Ibid., pp. 5–13.
220 Ibid., p. 13.
221 For a lucid and detailed account of the events leading up to the civil war and the declaration of Bangladesh’s independence with India’s assistance, ibid., pp. 185–213.
mangoes to counteract the ugliness around.\footnote{Husain, \textit{Basti}, pp. 204–5.} There is a gentle irony in the portrayal of such poetic invocations of transcendent possibilities and utopian projections of desire in a time of strife and conflict.

Zakir hears about people who have fled Pakistan to rejoin their family in India.\footnote{In this context also see Priya Kumar’s discussion of Shyam Benegal’s film \textit{Mammo}, about a woman from Pakistan who seeks to migrate back to India to rejoin her family. See P. Kumar, ‘Testimonies of Loss’, especially pp. 212–14. The novel, unlike the film, does not address the complex legal issues that arose for such reverse migrants.} For the country that had once been hostile to them was now matched in hostility by the country which they found themselves in.\footnote{Husain, \textit{Basti}, p. 216.} Just before his father dies, he hands Zakir the keys of their ancestral home back in India. However, with Abba Jan’s passing away, ties with the ancestral land seem to disintegrate as well.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 231–32.} Zakir gets a reply from Surendar after the war. He charges Zakir with becoming cruel after going to Pakistan, since he had made no effort to contact Sabirah, who had burst into tears after hearing about his letters to Surendar.\footnote{Ibid., p. 235.} The novel ends with the friends reassembling at the Shiraz, where they observe the ruins of the formerly splendid hotel damaged during the rioting. Zakir again expresses his desire to write a letter to Sabirah before it is too late but remains in a state of existential immobility, even as Afzal asks them to wait for a sign, a sign that must come during such a moment of crisis.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 261–63.} Once again the theme of a culture in internal decay facing the consequences of displacement at a time of political crisis comes to the fore. As a historian, Zakir becomes witness to the ambivalent effects of the partition’s afterlife in Pakistan. This is figured in terms of its impact on the realisation of long-cherished aspirations; whether in terms of creative relationships, or productive engagement with the legacy of the Indo-Islamic cultural amalgam that might lead to an activation of will at the individual and collective levels.
There are some explicit references in *Basti* to the difficulties faced by mohajirs or refugees on their way across the border in 1947, whether towards West or East Pakistan.\(^{228}\) Ironically, the anguish of displacement and dislocation, the violence and fear that accompanied 1947 are replayed in the context of the division of hearts in Pakistan in 1971. The narrative makes reference to political events then transpiring through oblique allusions. Husain looks at the consequences of political gamesmanship and communal/ethnic/sectarian polarisation at the individual level and through his characters, shows the capacity for civilisational memory to play a role amidst the ruins of the self. A network of allusions to Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist myth and history provides an allegorical structure through which the experience of disillusionment is mediated.\(^{229}\) Furthermore, the poetisation of exile and loss allows even those who may not share the Shia sensibility to identify with the situation of those surrounded by events that seem to defy comprehension. In *Basti*, the sense of loss is diffused into the symbolic domain. The motif of separation from the beloved, though a commonplace in poetry, is actualised and given contemporary resonance through the movement between the memory of childhood/adolescent experiences in pre-partition India and the moment of 1971. Sabirah represents for Zakir the wellspring of possibilities he is now cut off from; he is left with a sense of an unrealised epiphany that might have awaited him and, by extension, the community. The friends may look out for the sign which may provide the direction, a beacon which might help them find a way, but in the present there is the grim reality of repetition of the wrenching of self and community from the place of anchorage. Indeed, prolonged separation may be a mode of being that the self might have to come to terms with, whether in concrete terms at the individual level, as in the relationship with Sabirah, or in terms of exile for the community, especially given the anxiety as regards the possibility of infinite repetition of the partition.\(^{230}\)

\(^{228}\) Sixty per cent of the 464,000 mohajirs from Uttar Pradesh resettled in Sindh, in cities like Karachi. The attachment for a lost Uttar Pradesh world remained with many of the community, as Husain’s stories show, with an emphasis on protection of Urdu. See Talbot, *Pakistan*, p. 109.

\(^{229}\) See Bodh Prakash, ‘Nation and Identity’, p. 88.

\(^{230}\) I am indebted for this idea to Aamir Mufti.
Husain delves into the realm of memory to retrieve the ground for such expressions of beauty and goodness, not merely as a romantic gesture or sentimental move. Rather, it is the belated recognition of the desolation that faces the self and the community that impels the protagonist–historian’s quest in the realm of individual and collective memory. The further impasses such a quest might run into are further elucidated in a later discussion of Husain’s short stories, in which the near-impossibility of recovery of memory and the near-extinction of the creative self are thematised.\footnote{See Memon, ‘Partition Literature’, pp. 406–9.} In stories such as ‘The Stairway’ (discussed in Chapter Five), retrieval of memory of the homeland and the rituals practised during Moharram are figured as an existential necessity for sleep-deprived mohajirs.\footnote{Also see Memon’s discussion of this story, in ibid., pp. 406–7.} In \textit{Basti}, however, memory becomes a route into an investigation of alternative perceptions and civilisational sites where counter-memories such as Afzal’s rose gardens and mango orchards may still be reconstructed. Zakir (his name means ‘one who remembers’) is both witness and a witness of witnesses; through such reflexivity a form of poetic narrativisation becomes possible for the survivor–exile, even though some aspects of collective trauma may remain undecipherable.

In conclusion, given the shock and horror of cataclysmic violence and uprooting, a large-scale inability to work through the traumatic memory of the partition may be noted in the generation that experienced the partition of the subcontinent.\footnote{Many writers of the first generation continued to write about the partition in subsequent decades; the distinction made here between first and second generations is not a sharp one, given that many novels of the 1960s and 70s were written by those who were young children or young adults at the time of the partition, rather than by children of survivors. The consciousness of a generation having passed does underpin later writing, nevertheless.} There was insufficient societal as well as artistic engagement with the aftermath of collective violence of 1947 in both countries due to the predominant mood of celebration of independence and the pressures of nationalist ‘emotionalism’. The effects of historical trauma were nevertheless manifested directly in terms of embodied forms of witnessing marked by silence, as in the case of the abducted women. It was as if collective trauma was displaced into phantasmal and
disembodied forms that remained in circulation in the body politic. These spectral configurations of the nation and the ‘other’, often taking the form of hate-speech or underground pamphlets, drew upon memories of previous conflicts to legitimate communal or sectarian attacks in the present. Thus literary witnessing became a more complex problem. Indeed, we may note the phenomenon of secondary trauma, of witnessing the trauma of witnesses, as exemplified by the writings of many in the second generation of writers. We may also be reminded here of Radstone’s invocation of Freud’s notion of ‘afterwardsness’, whereby memory may be revised by the pressures of the present, complicating issues of temporality. Radstone argues that the affect and activities associated with afterwardsness include fantasies of omnipotence and powerlessness. Later reconstructions are thus always mediated representations.

The major partition narratives of the 1960s and 70s often sought to fill in perceived holes in collective memory through the creation of narratives with a greater degree of self-reflexivity. The important novelists seek to retrieve the memory of social interaction between communities, as well as a critical awareness of gaps and structural inequities. A double vision, as Alok Bhalla argues, leads such writers down the tightrope above the memory of horror and allows for the possibility of taking responsibility and transmuting pain and guilt that, as Lifton suggests, are by-products of the fact of having survived the experience. These writers also negotiate the perverseness of false witness, often itself a result of the excessive emotionalism accompanying nationalist self-assertion.

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234 A discussion with Deepak Mehta helped clarify ideas presented here.  
235 See Radstone, Introduction to Memory and Methodology, pp. 85–89.  
236 Ibid., p. 101.  
238 According to Lifton, atrocity is a perverse quest for meaning, the end result of a spurious sense of mission, the product of false witness. Ibid., p. 138. The compensatory process in false witness, the need to bear witness and take on the survivor mission leads one to block out elements of the death encounter, leading to a numbing toward death, and the possibility of exploitation of victims. Lifton argues that what is perverse is that one must impose death on others in order to reassert one’s own life as an individual and a group. Ibid., pp. 138–41.
It is perhaps fitting that a chapter that began with a reflection on the afterlife of 1947 concludes with a discussion of a narrative depicting the next major geographical/political division during the partition of Pakistan in 1971, for this second partition re-enacted many of the traumatic experiences of the partition. Some novels written in this period do confirm extant prejudices and act out the pathological residue of violence, bitterness and hatred, as well as sadism and anomie. However, the engagement with historical/civilisational memory in the major novels discussed in detail raises the crucial question of remembrance to a different level. Ideas about the loss of vitality in society stemming from disengagement with the realm of the popular by the elite, as well as the dangers of erasure of memory of the cultural amalgam characteristic of civilization in South Asia, led to the positing of the need for recovery of civilisational memory based on dialogic exchange. Though even these counter-narratives are flawed instances of surrogate testimony in many respects, the experience of suffering and exile does become resonant for another generation, often through the use of metaphor. While tragic irony is the chosen vehicle of expression of disillusionment experienced by these writers, it is the reflexive take on memory that allows for a new language of description to emerge in the testimonial narratives of Attia Hosain, Abdullah Hussein, Bhisham Sahni, Rahi Masoom Raza and Intizar Husain.
Chapter 4

Narrativising the ‘Time of Partition’: Writings Since 1980

The afterlife of the partition and the continuation and prevalence of the ‘time of partition’ as Deschaumes and Ivekovic phrase it, were represented, several decades after the event in different and problematic ways in novels published since 1980. Deschaumes and Ivekovic observe that ‘the moment of partition itself is the time of collective violence against individual destinies, that of massacres, the rape of women, aiming at wresting the other from the self, aiming at an unlikely homogeneity. It is the time of forced individual and mass displacements, the time when the refugee becomes the emblematic figure…’ even as such refugees are ‘amputated from their own biographies’.1 Afterwards, according to them, the time of partition invades the present, structures mentalities and modes of representation around a before and after, which turn out to be blurry zones.2

As in the case of writings of the 1960s and 70s, the recurrence of brutal episodes of pogroms/communal violence in India (especially 1984, 1992–93) and sectarian/ethnic strife in Pakistan (especially, but not only in Karachi), caused writers to return to the memory of 1947, improvising responses that were mediated by the present and that included a perception of blurred temporalities.3 Furthermore, instances of ethnic cleansing and/or genocidal violence in Bosnia,

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1 Deschaumes and Ivekovic eds. Preface to Divided Countries, pp. viii–ix.
Witnessing Partition

Rwanda and Gujarat (in 2002) reminded writers and scholars of the immediacy of threats to minority communities with the recurrence of barbarism. Such massacres indicated that historical experiences such as the Holocaust and the partition were not isolated events left behind in time. A new wave of historical/sociological writing identifying aspects of partition violence as comparable to other paradigmatic events in which genocidal violence took place may have inflected the writing of some of the novels written in this period. In particular, the extent of ethnic cleansing in both East and West Punjab in 1947 was compared to other instances of genocide and mass slaughter of entire communities, even as the historical specificity of the violence in 1947 was underlined.

Many writers who may be grouped in the second generation after the partition had not directly witnessed partition violence or may have been very young at the time, as we have seen earlier. Recent fictional representations of partition are often based on conversations with those (including former refugees) who were affected by the violence of the partition. Secondary or even tertiary modes of literary witnessing were thus often derived from images and representations that travelled through time, via family history or collective memory. These narratives often feature protagonists who face intractable ethical and moral dilemmas in personal relationships, rooted in or inherited from past tangles and conflicts.


I am indebted for this idea to Shail Mayaram. Her research on the (partial) ethnic cleansing (locally termed ‘safaya’) of the Meos during the partition in the princely states of Alwar and Bharatpur was conducted at a time when massacres of Muslims in Bosnia were taking place. Personal communication; also see Mayaram, Resisting Regimes, pp. 162–220. In the volume of essays edited by Deschaumes and Ivekovic eds. Divided Countries, a comparative analysis of different partition experiences, including the recent break-up of Yugoslavia, is attempted.
and the effects of historical trauma. Meanwhile, configuring of the ‘other’ at the societal and national levels continued relentlessly, leading up to the nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan and reinforcing the need to make peace with the past.\(^5\) Significant writing engaged with the memory of the partition from the perspective of the second and third generations to arrive at an understanding of the limits of narrative and artistic representation in dealing with the legacy of historical trauma. Despite the near impossibility of representing the totality of the partition experience and the elusiveness of fragments that remained, the ethical imperative of bearing witness continued to underpin the best writing on partition in this phase. Such writing often drew in turn on the language of description generated by earlier writings.

During previous decades, the certitudes of the Nehruvian era were shattered in India as communal violence fuelled by Right-wing ideology and virulent rhetoric erupted time and again. The inability of the state to contain such incidents and the failure of governance, in some instances amounting to complicity in incidents of collective violence, vividly reminded many of the catastrophic violence and displacements of 1947.\(^6\) The rise of Hindu nationalism and the perceived crisis of secularism prompted significant debates

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\(^5\) In Suvir Kaul’s terms, the nuclearisation of India and Pakistan is an extraordinary moment in the narrative of the partition, both in its telos, which confirms the jingoism and hatred underpinning the drive to partition and its inversion, as a reminder that as nations our fates have never been separate. For him the looming mushroom cloud(s) may be the moment of apocalyptic return of repressed memory. See Introduction in Kaul ed. *Partitioning of Memory*, pp. 2–3. Also see *Countdown*, Amitav Ghosh’s essay collection in response to the Pokhran nuclear blasts of 1998, and Radha Kumar’s incisive analysis of continuing India-Pakistan hostility and its roots in the partition in *Making Peace with Partition*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2005.

\(^6\) As Amrik Singh points out, religious fundamentalism has grown, not declined, since 1947 in both India and Pakistan. While in Pakistan the decision to name the country the Islamic Republic of Pakistan led inevitably to subsequent developments such as the introduction of *Shariat* laws, for Singh the Indian case is more difficult to understand. While the twists and turns of Hindu thinking during the British period may have contributed to the insecurity of Hindu parties, he wonders why this should persist well after the partition years. For Singh, the rise of the BJP is a convincing
as regards the place of religion in Indian society.\textsuperscript{7} Such rethinking was also necessitated by new forms of mediatised and ‘virtual’ religiosity that accompanied the growth of the Hindu right during this time.\textsuperscript{8} The earlier sense of confidence in the nation–state gave way to even more incisive interrogation of models inherited from the colonial as well as nationalist eras. Feminist concerns prompted independent scholars to investigate the archive relating to partition afresh, uncovering the silenced history of abducted women as well as disturbing aspects of attempts by the two nation–states to recover and rehabilitate such women, sometimes against their will. The placement of concerns relating to gender and sexuality at the centre of the analysis (as Kaul emphasises, with reference to the work of Butalia, Menon and Bhasin) enabled a rethinking of the biases
underpinning institutional structures of the state and the intersections between patriarchal ideology and sexual violence directed against women.\textsuperscript{9}

The discipline of history itself became more attentive in the 1980s and 90s to the ideological assumptions of the historiography of an earlier era, as well as to the need to come to terms with the history of violence and attendant pain and suffering.\textsuperscript{10} The Subaltern Studies project in its early years further interrogated the failure of nationalist elites to adequately represent the interests of subaltern classes in Indian society.\textsuperscript{11} A greater degree of self-consciousness about forms of narrative was often in evidence in such historical writing, alert to silences in the archive. An awareness of the different and problematic ways in which individual and collective memory

\textsuperscript{9} Introduction to Kaul ed. ‘The Partitions of Memory’, pp. 10–12.

\textsuperscript{10} Marxist historians such as Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib and Sumit Sarkar had of course earlier demonstrated a sharp consciousness as regards the vantage point of historical writing, and the need to write Indian history while taking into account the point of view of the underclass and the dispossessed. See the sympathetic yet critical account of the role played by Thapar and Habib in redefining the objectives of a narrowly nationalist historiography in Bhargava, ‘History, Nation’, pp. 193–200. Sarkar points to the transformative impetus that resulted from the foregrounding of the Marxist category of class, which he cautions has often been theoretically repudiated in recent critical discourses drawing on identity politics. See Sarkar, Beyond Nationalist Frames: Relocating Postmodernism, Hindutva, History, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002 (rpt 2005), pp. 192–93. Also see Pandey, ‘The Prose of Otherness’ in David Arnold and Hardiman eds. Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994 (rpt 1997), pp. 194–95.

\textsuperscript{11} For a criticism of colonialist and elitist historiography, see Guha, ‘Preface’, ‘On some aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India’, ‘The Prose of Counter-Insurgency’ in Guha and Spivak eds. Selected Subaltern Studies, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 35–86. In his critical remarks as regards the subaltern studies project, Sarkar refers to the turn to identity politics based on religious community, caste and gender in recent subaltern studies volumes, and a culturalist turn that excessively prioritises questions of identity and origin. See Sarkar Beyond Nationalist Frames, pp. 188–89. For a ‘small history’ of subaltern studies and a cogent defence of the subaltern studies project in response to Sarkar’s criticisms, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002 (rpt 2004), pp. 3–37.
could be incorporated into historical understanding underpinned important studies of localities and micro-histories of particular communities.\(^\text{12}\)

In the sphere of literary criticism, Ananya Kabir’s essay on Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* foregrounds the question of minority subjectivity. Kabir argues that the trope of fragmentation in Book One becomes an index to the fracturing of the capacity for narrative representation that the partition brought about.\(^\text{13}\) While her reading of the novel in the light of debates regarding the representation the memory of the Holocaust is insightful, it seems at times that Rushdie is more intent on playfully reassembling the shards of history to demonstrate his dexterity as a magical realist rather than making a serious point about the (un)representability of partition violence. Rushdie’s debt to Gunter Grass’ *The Tin Drum* is evident, as Saleem Sinai’s magical abilities echo that of Grass’ protagonist, Oskar Matzerath. However, Rushdie’s novel is not primarily about the partition; furthermore, I disagree with Kabir’s description of Rushdie’s ‘light touch’ treatment of partition violence. Rather, there is a risk of trivialisation of the historical experience of dislocation in this novel.\(^\text{14}\) Even so, this allegorical take on the foundational moment of nation–states in South Asia, with its irreverent send-up of many nationalist icons and self-conscious treatment of themes of memory and forgetting, as in the case of protagonist Saleem Sinai’s amnesia, opened up further dialogic possibilities for writers who looked back to 1947.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^\text{12}\) This was also a result of the advent of techniques of discourse analysis and post-structuralist theory, as in the work of Shahid Amin, esp. *Event, Metaphor, Memory*.

\(^\text{13}\) Kabir, ‘Subjectivities’, pp. 246, 262.

\(^\text{14}\) The slipperiness of Rushdie’s allusions to partition violence in this text may be a function of Rushdie’s valorisation of ‘migrancy’. Ahmad effectively critiques Rushdie’s notion of ‘migrancy’ as a universal ontological condition in his discussion of *Shame*, Rushdie’s novel about Pakistan under martial rule. See Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press., especially pp. 123–58.

\(^\text{15}\) Recently Beniwal makes a case for post-Rushdie partition fiction as a form of ‘historiographic metafiction’. This argument becomes forced as he includes novels such as Mukul Kesavan’s *Looking through Glass* (1995) in this category. See Beniwal, *Representing Partition*, pp. 153–80. Rather, such novels aspire to be irreverent biographies of the nation, as in the case of *Midnight’s Children*. 
More pertinent than Rushdie for the purpose of this analysis are novels by Anita Desai and Krishna Baldev Vaid. Both writers, unsurprisingly, given their familiarity with academic debates, exemplify the shift in emphasis from histories of grand events and important personages to ‘little’ histories of inner lives, often of people and/or communities on the margins of history. Their novels focus more on the inner self and human psychology and deploy symbolism and strategies of refraction, rather than the reflectionist model of conventional realism. Desai and Vaid use narrative techniques such as shifts between disparate time frames or a stream of consciousness mode to indicate the perturbations of memory caused by cataclysmic historical events. In the work of both writers, the experience of children and adolescents as witnesses to such catastrophic changes in the world around them is brought to the fore. The less visible and delayed effects of collective violence during the partition on the inner lives of sensitive individuals and the family and community spaces in which they exist become apparent in these novels. A more subtle statement about the insidious effects of communal rhetoric and its actualisation in practice with respect to women, especially during mob violence, appears in their work. Both these writers also focus in different ways on the impact of such violence on traditions of syncretism and exchange between communities and the fragile memory of such traditions: in Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* it is the world of old Delhi that is the locus of reflection, while in Vaid’s *The Broken Mirror* it is a township in rural Punjab as well as the city of Lahore.

In the 1980s and 90s another strand of fiction emerged which drew heavily on family and community history in its reconstruction of the past, often identitarian in emphasis and sometimes manifesting an inability to empathise with the suffering of the ‘other’ community. *Ice Candy Man*, a novel by Pakistani writer of Parsi origin Bapsi Sidhwa makes explicit allusions to the Holocaust and incorporates a witness account of partition violence. Her writing shows awareness to an extent of debates relating to Holocaust memory and its retrieval. The novel takes an identitarian turn in its representation of partition violence compromising claims of its being a work of ‘documentary fiction’. *What the Body Remembers*, a recent novel by Shauna Singh Baldwin, a Sikh writer based in Canada, that draws on family history to tell the story of the partition from a Sikh woman’s point of view is critically analysed as well, as a novel that risks overplaying gender concerns.
Post-memorial novels by semi-diasporic Pakistani writers such as Kamila Shamsie and Sorayya Khan emerge from the experience of the third generation after the partition, still negotiating the burden of the past. In both Shamsie’s and Khan’s work the legacy of the historical trauma of 1971, in turn forged in the crucible of 1947, has to be faced up to by the next generation. Khwabrau (trans. Sleepwalkers), Joginder Paul’s Urdu novel about the psychological costs of the persistence of memory for mohajirs from Lucknow in Karachi, is briefly analysed in this chapter as well.

Narrating Extreme Violence: Representing the Holocaust

An array of historical, psychological and sociological studies of the Holocaust appeared up to the 1980s, after an initial period of silence. An earlier generation of historians led by Raul Hilberg had initiated the task of uncovering the history of the destruction of the European Jewry in horrific detail. Hannah Arendt’s meditations on the modalities of Holocaust violence after the Eichmann trial were of profound significance. She offered a compelling analysis of the ‘banality of evil’ as manifested during the planned ‘final solution’ by the Nazis in Eichmann in Jerusalem (1963). Elie Wiesel’s autobiographical Night (1958) was one of the first records of

16 Berel Lang estimates the number of studies of and fictional works about the Holocaust as running into the tens of thousands until the 1980s. See Introduction in Lang ed. Writing and the Holocaust. New York: Holmes and Meier, p. 1.

17 For a meditation by a historian on the difficulty of writing the first major historical reconstruction of the Holocaust, see Hilberg, ‘I was not there’ in Lang ed. Writing and the Holocaust, pp. 17–26. For a discussion of the politics of memory, see Hilberg, The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996.

18 As Arendt’s important account of totalitarianism showed, the aim was the most efficient bureaucratised fabrication of corpses, and prior to that, living corpses in the death camps. Arendt’s magisterial study also demonstrated the connection between the previous history of imperialism and racism and the emergence of totalitarian regimes in Europe. See Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, San Diego: Harvest, 1948 (rpt 1994), pp. 437–59.
personal experience in the concentration camps to appear, a self-declared instance of testimonial literature. In his novel *The Accident* (1961) Wiesel further developed the idea of survivors carrying a death-orientation with them into normal life, having already died a metaphorical death in the camps. Memoirs by Primo Levi (*Survival in Auschwitz* (1958), *The Reawakening* (1965)), Jean Amery (*At the Mind’s Limits* (1964)) and Wladislaw Szpilman (*The Pianist* (1948)) were republished after an initial phase of neglect, while fresh work by Levi broke new ground while coming to terms with the afterlife of the Holocaust in Europe in *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986).

After a time lag of several decades writing on the subject in fictional form began to appear with greater frequency. Novels by survivors such as Imre Kertesz depicted the effects of genocidal violence, often through the experiences of children confronted with near incomprehensible manifestations of pathological behaviour. *Fateless* (1975), Kertesz’ ironic and restrained rendering of a young Hungarian boy’s experience of barbarism in Auschwitz and subsequent rejection of fated suffering, may be contrasted to *The Painted Bird* (1965), Jerzy Kosinski’s near sado-masochistic account of a Jewish boy’s wanderings across Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe in which extreme forms of violence (including anti-Semitic attacks) are represented as a part of normal life in the Polish countryside. Berel Lang argues that in the 1970s and 80s writing about the Holocaust was marked as never before by an awareness of its status as writing, given the moral as well as aesthetic justification presumed to be necessary for undertaking such an exercise; what was new was a pressing upon the writer of the notion of moral accountability for the very act of writing.\(^19\) For example, we may note the explicit citation of debates about the unrepresentability of the ‘Final Solution’ in William Styron’s *Sophie’s Choice* (1976). The narrator, an aspiring writer, quotes George Steiner’s observation in *Language and Silence* that silence may be the answer; that it may be best ‘not to add to the trivia of literary, sociological debate to the unspeakable’.\(^20\) The narrator also refers to Elie Wiesel’s view that novelists have made free use of the Holocaust and cheapened


it, draining it of substance.\footnote{Cited in Styron, \textit{Sophie’s Choice}, p. 237.} The narrator is sceptical of such positions, which seem to sacralise the event. Despite such qualms, he does make somewhat melodramatic use of the story of Sophie, a Polish survivor, who once inhabited the ‘grey zone’ of collaborators in Auschwitz and was forced by a sadistic official to make a choice between her two children during a ‘selection’.

Interviews with survivors began to be collected at a greater pace in the 1980s and 90s; studies of the effects of trauma on survivors brought out the difficulties of dealing with traumatic memory.\footnote{The cofounder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies provides a sensitive account of this experience. See Dori Laub, ‘Truth and Testimony’, pp. 61–75.} The limits to recovery of memory of a traumatic event and the gaps and blockages that often characterised attempts to form narrative memory through fictional emplotment began to be better recognised.\footnote{See B. A. Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart, ‘The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma’ in Caruth ed. \textit{Trauma}, pp.158–82.} W.G. Sebald thematised the difficulty of recovering such traumatic memory in works such as \textit{The Emigrants} (1993) and \textit{Austerlitz} (2001), reconfiguring the genre of the novel in his subtle interweaving of fictionalised personal memories and historical reflections on the questions of genocide and displacement. In \textit{The Emigrants} Sebald’s narrator explicitly articulates his personal struggle to write the story of a Jewish survivor.\footnote{While working on the account of the Jewish emigrant Max Ferber, the narrator is beset by scruples that nearly paralyse him, causing him to question the whole business of writing. See Sebald, \textit{The Emigrants}, trans. Michael Hulse, London: Vintage, 1993 (rpt 2002), pp. 230–31.} In \textit{Austerlitz} a child of parents executed during the Holocaust, himself brought up in Wales as a war orphan, strives to rediscover their story and escaping deep into the Amazon jungle. There are several references in this novel to B-grade fictions (novels and films) that exploit the Holocaust for sensational ends. Steiner’s remarkable narrative about an attempt by Nazi-hunters to track Hitler down ends with a reflection on the ironic possibility that in a media-driven society there may be an audience for Hitler’s seductive anti-Semitic rhetoric even many years after the defeat of Nazism. See Steiner, \textit{The Portage to San Cristobal of A. H.}, London: Faber and Faber, 1979 (rpt 1992), pp. 120–26.
his childhood memories through traces in photographs in a family album and a propaganda film made about the concentration camp at Theresienstadt where his mother was incarcerated. Narratives such as Thomas Keneally’s *Schindler’s List* (1982) exemplify a blurring of the boundary between documentation and fiction. The novel indicated a problematic shift in emphasis from the victim to the rescuer or exception amongst the perpetrators. Bernhard Schlink’s novel *The Reader* (1997) pushed the boundaries of representation of the afterlife of the Final Solution further in its portrayal of the all-too-human relationship between a German adolescent and a former Nazi woman prison guard who is eventually held more than accountable for her wartime actions.

The case of a ‘fictional’ memoir being passed off as a genuine account of life in the camps and the subsequent expose of Binjamin Wilkomirski’s writing as a fake (an accusation also levelled at Kosinski’s novel *The Painted Bird*, after his claim that it was based on experiences during the Holocaust years was subsequently shown not to be true) further complicated the issue of representing the Holocaust and raised the question of limits to the quest for authenticity of suffering.

A recent novel, Jonathan Safran Foer’s *The character Austerlitz is finally able to find a copy of the film, made by the Nazis as a propaganda vehicle for the rest of the world to obscure the reality of the horrors of the camps, which he views repeatedly and in slow motion to find the image of his lost mother. See Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell, London: Penguin, 2001 (rpt 2002), pp. 342–49.*

26 *After his purported memoir *Fragments* was applauded by critics as a moving account about the experience of a child in the concentration camps, it was discovered that Wilkomirski was not himself a survivor, but rather may have derived his understanding of life in the camps from a reading of Holocaust literature. Bruno Grosjean (his real name) actually assumed the identity of a survivor after growing up in an orphanage and as a foster child, after being abandoned by his mother. See Feuchtwang, ‘Loss: transmissions, recognitions, authorisation’ in Radstone and Hodgkin eds. *Regimes of Memory*, pp. 79–89. Kosinski was with his family during the war years, and did not wander across the Polish countryside as his protagonist does in the novel. Rather, his father assumed a Gentile identity and instructed his son to conceal his Jewishness then. He claimed that the book was a work of ‘auto-fiction’ based on personal experiences, nonetheless. See D. G. Myers, ‘Rev. of “Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography”’ by J. P. Sloan’.*
ribald *Everything is Illuminated* (2002), narrated from a third generation perspective, thematises the perils of haphazard recovery of traumatic memory. Foer irreverently retells the story of life in Jewish shtetls in pre-war Eastern Europe and their subsequent destruction, using different narrative voices framed by the perspective of the protagonist, a third generation American Jew who visits Ukraine in search of the woman who had saved one of his grandparents during the Nazi era. In a self-reflexive take on the ambivalent consequences of erasure of such memory, parts of the novel are narrated in epistolary form from the point of view of the young Ukrainian grandson of a man who, along with his community, turns out to be partly responsible for the death of a Jewish relative of the protagonist. The tragic outcome of such a late revelation of a former witness–perpetrator’s identity for present-day Ukrainians is brought to the fore, rather than a reiteration of the story of Jewish victimhood, or the recapitulation of a simple tale of rescue from persecution.27

In scholarly writings from India, to take some examples, Ashis Nandy, Veena Das and Shail Mayaram came to terms with analytical models developed in relation to the Holocaust as a limit case or extreme event in their critiques of modes of collective violence in India.28 In her later writings, following the ideas of Primo Levi and others, Das foregrounded the notion of witness as a third position not identical to that of perpetrator or victim. For Das, the testimony of the witness, sometimes in the face of the impossibility of the victims themselves speaking, allowed for the articulation of an ethical stance and a movement beyond the binaries (such as that of victim and perpetrator) that the moment of extreme violence generated.29 Later, Shail Mayaram underlined the role of memory


29 I am indebted to Deepak Mehta for this formulation. Also see Das, ‘Our Work to Cry: Your Work to Listen’ in Das ed. *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 345–98. Das refers to the work of Koselleck on the question of interpreting the dreams of survivors of the Holocaust as a mode of witness to adequately understand the terror that was then generated. See Das, *Critical Events*, pp. 188–89.
in countering the erasure imposed by paradigmatic events like the Holocaust and the partition at the level of both speech and inscription (Mayaram 162–64). Mayaram argued the case for treating the massacres of the Meos during the partition years in Alwar and Bharatpur states as a case of attempted genocide.\(^{30}\) Nandy conducted a systematic comparison of the two events, indicating continuing psychological aftereffects of partition in the Subcontinent as in the case of the Holocaust.\(^{31}\) Alam and Sharma’s criticism of comparisons of partition violence with the Holocaust, which also raised the question of the ethics of such systematic attempts at recovering the memory of events in which boundaries became blurred, is discussed later in the chapter.\(^{32}\) More recently, Vikram Seth’s *Two Lives* (2005) addressed memories of the Holocaust while recounting the story of his aunt Henny, whose mother and sister were killed in the death camps.

‘Little’ Histories: Remembering the Inner Life of Old Delhi

In the sphere of fictional representation, Anita Desai drew on her German mother’s memories of life in Calcutta in wartime India while writing her remarkable novel *Baumgartner’s Bombay* (1988), which touches upon the Calcutta killings after Direct Action Day in 1946 as well as the Holocaust. Desai interweaves histories of inner lives and events on the world stage here in an intricate yet uncompromising way. The novel centres on the experiences of Hugo Baumgartner, a young Jew exiled by his family from Germany to protect him from the Nazis. Anti-Semitism reduces Hugo’s family to poverty, leading to his mother’s decision to send him to do business in India. Ironically, despite being Jewish, Baumgartner has to

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\(^{30}\) Furthermore, Mayaram takes issue with Arendt’s contention that violence and communication are mutually exclusive in her study of ethnic cleansing of the Meos, arguing that the use of public spaces to demarcate boundaries between the communities during the massacres of the Meo community indicated a lucidity of signification. See Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes*, p. 192.


\(^{32}\) See Alam and Sharma, ‘Remembering Partition’, pp. 98–103.
face wartime internment in a camp with other Germans in British India. After the war, in Calcutta, Baumgartner discovers a packet of letters from his mother, with dates that taper off in 1941. Each letter sent every month till then is inscribed with the same number; this acquires a further significance in the light of his mother’s likely fate as a concentration camp inmate in Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{33} Desai gives us an outsider’s perception of the violence during the Calcutta killings of 1946 to which Baumgartner becomes a witness after his internment during the war, causing him to flee eventually to Bombay. The narrative indirectly touches upon the difficulty of representing the horrors of genocide in the episodes depicting Hugo’s father’s traumatic return from Dachau and subsequent suicide in Germany, and his mother’s tragic though unknown death after becoming an exile. Baumgartner is seemingly distanced from Europe’s descent into the abyss, only for violence to eventually catch up with him in his derelict state of being in Bombay through a chance encounter with an ‘Aryan’ fellow countryman several decades later.\textsuperscript{34} The oblique treatment of the chilling facts about genocide as well as later, apparently random, manifestations of violence is characteristic of Desai’s style. Without directly describing the snuffing out of lives in the camps she evokes its horror, as well as the persistence of forms of pathological disregard for human life in the scene in which Baumgartner is casually murdered by a German backpacker in present-day India.

In Desai’s work there has thus been a concern with deeper patterns underlying the surface of everyday life and the ‘little’ histories that can cumulatively signify much more than what may initially be assumed. Her novels initially, dealt with women’s experiences and often depicted intricate family relationships. Subsequently she turned her attention to men’s experiences in society as well. Furthermore, Desai’s narratives often focused on less easily perceivable changes in society and culture. In \textit{Clear Light of Day} (1980), rather than restrict her focus to the narrow canvas of the inner household, she focused on events in the public domain in

\textsuperscript{33} A discussion with Aamir Mufti helped clarify the ideas presented in this section. Also see his persuasive reading of the novel in \textit{Enlightenment}, pp. 248–60.

the life of the nation, addressing History with a capital H through the subject of the partition and its aftermath.\textsuperscript{35} Desai depicts with insight irrevocable changes in the life-world of old Delhi as a result of the violence during the partition.

As Desai put it in an interview, she thought of constructing a four-dimensional world in \textit{Clear Light of Day}, with time as a fourth dimension.\textsuperscript{36} Desai wanted time to have as palpable an existence in the novel as the spatial world perceived by the five senses. For her, time is an element like light or darkness, pervasive, yet perceived by her characters as part of their everyday consciousness, while memory is an aspect of time, as defined in the work of poets like T. S. Eliot and Emily Dickinson, whose work she quotes in the frontispiece.

\begin{quote}
Memory is a strange bell—
Jubilee, and Knell—
(Dickinson, quoted in Desai).
\end{quote}

In the four chapters of the novel, a flawed family reunion is followed by a return to the youth of her characters, while in the third chapter infancy and childhood are depicted. The fourth chapter returns to the family reunion, while a few images and episodes are reflected upon from different angles at different times in the lives of her characters. Desai alludes to her technique of casting new light on these episodes with each twist of a prism, without exhausting the possibilities of further discoveries. According to her, her concern was to show how time appears to damage, destroy and extinguish, but one finds that nothing is lost or comes to an end, while the spiral of life leads as much upwards as downwards in a perpetual circular motion.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{35} Anita Desai was born to a German mother and Indian (Bengali) father in India. This novel was short-listed for the Booker prize, as were \textit{In Custody} (1984) and \textit{Fasting, Feasting} (1999). See biographical note, \textit{Clear Light of Day}. She is also the author of several other novels including \textit{The Zigzag Way} (2004).


For Desai the way of life of the ashraf Muslims of old Delhi seems to represent a certain model of syncretism. A high level of aesthetic sophistication underpins this blending of cultures, although this is depicted as existing along axes that are asymmetrical. The old world etiquette of ashraf society in which an appreciation of poetry, gracious manners and a notion of cultivated leisure prevailed is represented here in a way reminiscent of Ahmed Ali (especially his emphasis on the mingling of cultures that produced this world). This aristocratic way of life, predicated upon the continuation of modes of privilege and beautiful in a fragile way, is drastically affected by the spread of communal ideologies and strident identity politics in the 1940s. The possibilities of inclusiveness that underpin the syncretic model of culture also begin to vanish, given such attacks and the siege mentality that begins to afflict what was now being perceived more and more as a minority community.\(^{38}\) Even well off Muslims decide to leave Delhi’s environs in a climate of increasing intolerance and even threat to life, as in the case of Hyder Ali’s family’s migration to Hyderabad in the novel.

The violence of the partition thus forms the backdrop to the storyline, which shifts back and forth through time. The story of the siblings Bim (Bimla), Raja, Tara and Baba traverses experiences of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Early in the narrative the summer of 1947 is described as a time when they could see the city of Delhi burning every night, a moment of rude awakening to the reality of the world of adults.\(^{39}\) Through retrospective reflection on the events of childhood, the later rift in the family that ensues after the terrible misunderstanding between Raja and Bim is disclosed.\(^{40}\) The breakdown in this sibling relationship mirrors the breakdown of understanding between the communities at the level


\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 27.
of national politics, which is often represented as a form of sibling rivalry, as Kaul points out.\textsuperscript{41}

Even childhood is scarcely represented as an idyllic phase, since the children grow up with little attention paid to them by their parents, who seem to be ghostly presences more concerned with keeping up their social life at the club. The children are consigned to the care of their aunt Mira. As the poor relation who comes to their home to look after a patient and then stays on as their chief source of affection and support, aunt Mira plays an important role in shaping the consciousness of the young children until her eventual decline into alcoholism and insanity.\textsuperscript{42} The children are keenly aware of her acute need for their affection, as a neglected widow deprived of a home of her own. Indeed, the children seem to grow up by themselves, always conscious of the horrors that may lurk just beyond the immediate realm of the sheltered existence that they lead. This is symbolised by the well in the backyard into which the cow bought by the family fell and drowned. Its dead body had never been retrieved, leading to the abandonment of the well.\textsuperscript{43} The blight on the family fortunes is well conveyed by this episode in family history, which seems to taint the future as well. For when Tara attempts to get past some of the entanglements of family relationships, she is reminded time and again of that moment in the past and the deserted well symbolising the stagnation and unwholesomeness of part of their childhood.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} See Introduction in Kaul ed. \textit{The Partitions of Memory}, pp. 8–9. Furthermore, as Tan and Kudaisya point out, once the bulk of the leadership accepted the idea of the partition, Gandhi used the metaphor of the splitting up of a Hindu joint family to appeal to the people not to look at the creation of Pakistan with revenge and anger. In his view, if family members could not live together, they were free to set up their separate households to avoid constant quarrels, but separation did not mean that they should hate and kill each other, and deny their common history. See Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, \textit{The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia}, London: Routledge, 2000 (rpt 2002), p. 71. This metaphor may have crucially influenced the literary imagination in its use of narratives centred on family history.


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 118.

\textsuperscript{44} Kabir refers to the sense that the children live in a realm of frozen time after the partition. See Kabir, ‘Gender, Memory’, pp. 183–84.
Bim becomes a teacher of history at Indraprastha College in Delhi University. Her commitment to the world of ideas and the study of medieval history in particular and her closeness to her students give a deeper meaning to her existence. She is thus able to come to terms with the loss of her parents, the resulting decline in income and the responsibility of taking care of their feeble minded brother, Baba. The perennial childhood in which Baba remains becomes a touchstone; his gentle obliviousness is contrasted to the capacity for inflicting pain that seems to characterise the behaviour of adults. Baba remains lost in the world of music, taking delight in the simple pleasures of childhood games, unable to take on the responsibility of financial transactions as his sister hopes. Gramophone records allow him a precarious hold on reality and still the disturbances that time relentlessly brings in its wake. In sharp contrast to Bim’s endeavour to know the past through the discipline of history, Baba’s autism and aphasia symbolise the breakdown of communication in society.

During a visit to India from abroad Tara is stricken by guilt regarding certain episodes from their shared childhood that she strives to communicate to Bim. Amongst the memories that surface is the story of Raja’s growing closeness to the family of their neighbour Hyder Ali. The impact of partition violence is woven subtly into the thread of the narrative through the depiction of its effects on Raja’s friendship with this family. He develops a passionate interest in Urdu poetry during the gatherings at Hyder Ali’s house, where he discovers a mode of self-expression and being in sharp contrast with the situation at home. A hazy romanticism characterises the depiction of the atmosphere at these gatherings where people come to exchange ideas and poetry and discuss politics. There is an occasional over-emphasis here on the ideal type, unlike the more critical insider’s account in Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi*. In the process there is a risk of reifying the suffering of the ‘other’ community.

The conflict within the family that results when at Hyder Ali’s suggestion, Raja plans to take up Islamic Studies at the Jamia Millia University is presented, nevertheless, with keen psychological insight. Raja’s father refuses to allow this, citing the danger of aligning with

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46 Ibid., p. 10.
47 I am indebted to M. Asaduddin for this idea.
Muslims at a time when feelings had begun to run high in both communities. The father who had earlier been a virtual non-entity now becomes a key player in family discussions, using his inexorable logic to derail the aspirations of his son. Raja instead joins Hindu College to study English Literature, where he encounters Hindu communalists and ‘terrorists’ in the student community who attempt to ensure that Muslims are driven out of Delhi and try to persuade him to join them in acts of arson and murder. Passions run high in the college and Raja is forced to stop attending classes for a while to avoid violent confrontations. Meanwhile, Hyder Ali and his family leave the old Delhi neighbourhood and migrate to Hyderabad (rather than Pakistan). Their fate continues to worry Raja, whose youthful idealism is at its height as he expresses his desire to protect Muslims from Hindu extremists. But he is unable to do anything to help after contracting tuberculosis.

Bim and Baba visit Hyder Ali’s deserted house, after which Bim allows Baba to take back with them the gramophone that later becomes such an integral part of Baba’s lonely existence.

The pressure exerted by ‘nationalists’ representing the ‘majority’ community and the Hindu extremists to regard Urdu as an ‘alien’ language and an ‘alien’ culture thus curtails Raja’s choices, even though he retains his interest in reading and writing Urdu poetry. Furthermore, the vitiated atmosphere in the city of Delhi during this phase of inflamed communal passions is presented with restraint, as Right-wing organisations infiltrate the student body and recruit students to loot and destroy Muslim property. The extensive presence of such elements in educational institutions was

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48 Also see Joya Chatterji’s account of internal migrations of Muslims after the partition in Bengal. According to her, the focus on refugees fleeing across the border has led to an underplaying of the trauma undergone by such internal exiles, often forced into ghettos in Muslim dominated areas. See J. Chatterjee, ‘Of Graveyards and Ghettos: Muslims in Partitioned Bengal 1947–67’ in Hasan and Roy eds. Living Together Separately, pp. 222–49.

49 Desai, Clear Light, pp. 50–60.

50 Ibid., pp. 71–76.

51 For an account of the decline and ‘othering’ of Urdu in post-1947 India, see Hasan, Legacy, pp. 148–60, as well as Desai’s fictional representation of this process in In Custody (1984).

52 Desai, Clear Light, pp. 57–60.
not unlikely, given the scale and extent to which the demography of Delhi was affected. In Pandey’s account, students sitting for their matriculation examination in a high school in Qarol Bagh were dragged out and butchered in September 1947.\(^53\) Between 20–25,000 Muslims were killed in Delhi, and eventually only about 1.5 lakhs of Delhi’s 5 lakh Muslims remained towards the end of October 1947.\(^54\) In 1951, a census revealed just 99,000 Muslims residents.\(^55\) In the novel, Raja’s moral outrage and dissociation from the majority community modulates our response to these events.

Raja eventually moves to Hyderabad and marries the daughter of Hyder Ali. His long-standing desire to become part of the way of life of ashraf old Delhi, a source of fascination from childhood, finds fulfilment in this romance across the border of religious difference.\(^56\) Hyder Ali is democratic and tolerant enough to accept the marriage of his daughter to a young Hindu man like Raja, without wealth or distinguished family antecedents.\(^57\) Raja’s letter to Bim informing her after Hyder Ali’s death that he is now the landlord, and that she need not pay any extra rent for the accommodation in which they had grown up as children, precipitates the rift within the family and Bim’s decision not to communicate with or visit Raja subsequently.\(^58\) Desai does make an implicit criticism here of the patronising attitudes of the class of landlords and former rulers, mimicked to an extent by Raja once he arrives into a position of relative privilege. There is a symbolic resonance to this rift, partly a

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54 Ibid., p. 124.
55 See Tan and Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition*, especially p. 199. They provide an incisive account of the changes in Delhi’s urban and cultural landscape and the new ethos that replaced the Islamic culture of yore, resembling a ‘Wild west boomtown’ in which everyone was on the make. See Tan and Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition*, pp. 193–200.
57 For a discussion of such inter-community marriages based on liberal thinking during the period 1900–47 and the reaction in orthodox circles to the ‘scandals’ that then arose, as well as the attempt by communalists to transform the earlier ‘bee-hive’ like structure of society to one of closed and opposed boxes, see Nupur Chaudhry and R. K. Ray, ‘From Beehive Cells to Civil Space: A History of Indian Matrimony’ in Hasan and Roy eds. *Living Together Separately*, pp. 250–84, especially p. 253.
spill over from the violence in the external realm that both siblings had responded to with anguish and outrage. In consequence Raja identifies completely with his new world and ironically enough, erects a barrier between himself and his sister.

In Caruth’s terms, with reference to Freud’s understanding of trauma, the phenomenon of uncanny repetition afflicts many victims of trauma. The traumatic experience repeats itself through the unknowing acts of the survivors, sometimes against their will. Trauma, she suggests, is a wound afflicted not only upon the body but also on the mind. However, the wound on the mind is often experienced too soon, too unexpectedly to be known, and is thus not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again repeatedly in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. Trauma is thus not merely located in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in its unassimilated nature and the way in which it was precisely not known in the first instance returns to haunt the survivor later on. There may be a double telling at work in stories which are traumatic narratives, an oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlated crisis of life, between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival. In such texts, Caruth suggests, the inextricability of the story of one’s life from the story of a death, an impossible yet necessary double telling, constitutes historical witness. One may argue that Raja’s perception of the death of old Delhi culture and his own struggle to retain a connection with remnants of this culture leads to an over-identification with the victim community, damaging his bond with Bim. Though the targets

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60 Caruth argues, however, that the literary resonances of the repetition compulsion go beyond Freud’s theory of trauma. There may not merely be an unconscious act of the infliction of injury and inadvertent and unwished for repetition; rather, a moving or sorrowful voice that cries out may paradoxically be released through the wound. In an allusion to Tasso and his character Tancred, she describes traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent’s repeated and unknowing acts, but also as the enigma of the otherness of the human voice that cries out from the wound, a wound of voice that witnesses the truth that the agent may not fully know. See Caruth, ibid., pp. 2–3.
61 Ibid., pp. 1–6.
62 Ibid., pp. 7–8.
of organised violence in Delhi are Muslims, he is beset by trauma as witness to this violence, and thus unknowingly repeats the moment of separation in the breakdown of his relationship with his sister. Desai’s narrative achieves such a double telling as it traverses back and forth from the moment of violence to the later possibility of articulation. Healing may only begin, paradoxically enough, with the recognition of the difficulty of attaining knowledge of such wounds in the mind.

Subsequently, Bim ruthlessly analyses Raja’s early efforts at writing Urdu poetry, which she had once admired, and perceives his lack of originality. She begins to recognise that he has learnt enough to be a willingly derivative poet without the desire to write strikingly original compositions. Bim learns to deal with and forgive the memory of loss of dignity as well as the art of living within a given compass.63 This leads to an eventual reconciliation as Bim finally asks Tara to invite Raja to visit her and Baba.64 During a recitation of Hindustani vocal music by an ageing maestro, all too aware of the proximity of death, Bim is reminded of the line from T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, ‘Time the destroyer is time the preserver’.65 The novel ends with fissures in the family being rendered less absolute. The lasting guilt and collective trauma of the days of horror may never really disappear; but the quotidian, as in the experience of witnessing the musical performance, which ends with a composition by Iqbal, may allow for a certain equilibrium and composure to be regained.66 The maestro’s choice of the composition by Iqbal signifies the partial recovery of a notion of porous boundaries and the unfreezing of temporal flows.67 There is the

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64 Ibid., p. 176.
65 Ibid., p. 182.
66 Brijraj Singh compares the novel’s structure to music in which themes and patterns recur and are integrated, and in the way past and present are interwoven in the novel, especially with reference to T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* and Iqbal’s composition set to music. See Brijraj Singh, ‘Desai’s *Clear Light of Day*: A Study’ in Srivastava ed. *Perspectives on Anita Desai*, pp. 192–93.
67 Through the undoing of such blockages in the self and the restoration of familial bonds music may perform what Kabir refers to as its function of commemoration and healing, where narrative might falter. See Kabir, Kabir, ‘Musical Recall: Postmemory and the Punjabi Diaspora’, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 24 (2004): 186.
possibility of recognition of the effects of traumatic history on both communities, as well as their mutual implication in such histories and the need to listen to wounds that may continue to speak much after the event.

The Divided Township: Remembrance of Partitions Past

Krishna Baldev Vaid’s *Guzara Hua Zamana* (1981 trans. *The Broken Mirror* 1994), touches upon childhood experiences of events before and leading up to the partition, the true significance of which is not possible to discern at the moment and which fall into place only much later.68 This is the time of pre-partition, as Deschaumes and Ivekovic put it, ‘the time of stigmatisation of communities, of rising tensions around projects seeking to demonstrate the incompatibility of the collective identities involved, whether they be religious, linguistic, ideological or economic…’.69 In stylistic terms the novel is a tour de force combining different modes of narration, primarily from the point of view of the precocious adolescent Beero. In this novel about memory and desire Vaid conducts an exploration of the moment when ‘the political path is abandoned in favour of the logic of division and separation’.70

*The Broken Mirror* was written 25 years after Vaid’s first novel about an unhappy child’s quest for joy, *Uska Bachpan* (1957 trans. author *Steps in Darkness* 1962). His child protagonist Beero reappears here as an adolescent. The descriptions of details of home, neighbourhood, community and school in a township in rural Punjab are interspersed with a sense of impending doom.

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69 Deschaumes and Ivekovic eds. ‘Preface’ in *Divided Countries*, p. viii.

70 Ibid., p. viii.
Though Beero’s world is seemingly impervious to turbulence in the political sphere, there is an awareness of incipient cracks in the social formation. Assumptions about the other community as well as commensal taboos and prejudices can, paradoxically, be scrutinised and questioned more sharply by the young friends in this phase of heightened tensions. The desire to transgress such taboos often takes the form of erotic daydreams, as the adolescent mind is suffused with an interest in sexuality, with objects of fantasy often taking the form of the forbidden. Beero has vivid dreams about violence and the prospect of clashes to come, intermingled with dreams of erotic intensity set in the courtesans’ quarter in Lahore’s Hira Mandi.\footnote{See Vaid, \textit{The Broken Mirror}, p. 125. For a somewhat romanticised description of the life-world in the Hira Mandi in pre-partition Lahore, which became a centre of culture, especially with regard to poetry, music and dance, see Pran Neville, ‘The Splendours of Hira Mandi or Tibbi’ in Bapsi Sidhwa ed. \textit{City of Splendour: Writings on Lahore}, pp. 74–81.}

The characters in this novel include Beero’s friends Aslam and Keshav; the exchanges between the young friends illustrate their growing and often ribald awareness of sexuality. This interaction is often presented with a conscious play on Freudian ideas such as the Oedipus complex, as in the case of Keshav’s curious, near incestuous relationship with his mother.

Given the practice of segregation from girls their own age, sisters and mothers of friends and prostitutes from the other community become objects of erotic fascination for Beero and his friends. Mumtaz Shanti, a \textit{tawaif} (courtesan) and singer, posts the slogan ‘No religion preaches hatred among men!’ outside her door, ensuring that Hindus and Muslims alike shed their religious differences as they enter.\footnote{See Vaid, \textit{The Broken Mirror}, p. 99.} Perhaps the reason for this is that as Manto’s stories indicated, it was as if the brothels were increasingly the only spaces free from the contamination of the communal virus.\footnote{I am indebted for this suggestion to Aamir Mufti. For an extended discussion of the alternative affective economy in such spaces in a time of nationalist construction of an idealised image of Hindu womanhood as maternal icon, with reference to Manto’s stories, see Mufti ‘A Greater Story-Writer than God’, especially pp. 13–33.}
self-transformation for the young boys. However, this takes place in a context in which the hardening of identity and the growing shrillness of religious rhetoric had exacerbated already existing fears and tensions. Indeed, it is such fears that eventually become the rationale for attacks that were earlier considered unthinkable, even against neighbours and friends.

Indeed, Vaid later criticised the opening of Sahni’s *Tamas* as inauthentic for showing violence to be the result of machinations by politicians outside the community. Here, instead, it is people within the village community who harbour a capacity for atrocity in the name of religion, even though this may actually be on account of their greed and desire for property and power. The need to exact vengeance for perceived crimes in the past and a history of humiliation also plays a role in such breakdown of social norms. Though meetings are held in the public sphere to argue for the need for reconciliation and forgiveness, this effort evaporates the moment when such latent hatreds surface, represented in the novel as a form of insanity far worse than that manifested by the eccentrics. Peacemakers such as Congress leader Himmat Singh are unable to forestall the massacre and mass rapes that follow. Even the young such as Keshav become victims of the ferocity of rage and the blight of communal othering. A Marxist understanding of the societal roots to violence underpins the narrative, as does an empathy for the underdog and those at the margins of society. However, this framework does not exhaust the meaning of the novel, given its ability to convey the elusive effects of collective violence on the self and the community. The stylistic experimentation initiated by the author includes the use of dream work, hallucinations and a stream of consciousness style of narration that at times consciously follows techniques developed by modernists such as Proust and Joyce.

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75 As Vaid later put it, asymmetrical dietary and sexual taboos, as well as unfair money-lending practices and cruel treatment of tenants by Hindu landlords contributed to this sense of humiliation. Ibid., pp. 133–36.
76 Ibid., p. 131.
77 Ibid., p. 122. Vaid spoke later of writing a novel with a Proustian structure in which public and private memories are intermingled, as in *Remembrance of Things Past*. 
The children in the small town in West Punjab (based on Dinga, near Gujrat in west Punjab, where Vaid grew up) in which the novel is set are unimpressed by the rhetoric of high politics, and inter-community friendships do not seem to be affected initially by the talk about Pakistan.\textsuperscript{78} The young Hindu protagonist Beero seriously contemplates his friend Aslam’s suggestion regarding converting to Islam to be able to become a devotee of Mumtaz Shanti. Furthermore, many Hindu–Muslim affairs occur despite taboos and inhibitions on account of communal tensions, which begin to get worse with the advent of Pakistan movement.\textsuperscript{79} Even the Ramlila procession can now lead to a potential disturbance, despite the fact that Muslims had previously enacted parts in the performances. The reformist Arya Samaj’s pernicious influence on everyday experience, with its drive to purify Hinduism, is shown to be one of the causes for this.\textsuperscript{80} Dreams play an important role in Beero’s perception of the changes taking place in the order of existence which he is familiar with. He has a dream in which he sees Gandhi sitting at a vegetable grower’s well with the \textit{Gita} in one hand and the \textit{Quran} in the other, after which a sharp command from the Quaid-e-Azam causes everybody to change into a wild animal. These dream sequences, surreal in tone, entail a drastic reinterpretation of the logic underlying communal violence and the drives that animate hatred.\textsuperscript{81} For the personal realm appears as vulnerable to sudden intrusions, leading to unpredictable mutations of self. Later, Beero’s dreams of dislocation and death are actualised in horrific ways.

In a profoundly ironic episode questioning the foundational assumptions of Punjabi Hindu society, Beero’s sister Devi jumps into a well after being refused permission to marry the man she desires. A Muslim offers to rescue her but commensal taboos and the fear of the well being polluted forestall his attempt to bring her out.\textsuperscript{82} Vaid thus captures the changes in the tenor of everyday experience at a time when controversies in political life were gaining

\textsuperscript{78} Vaid, \textit{The Broken Mirror}, pp. 95–97.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 117.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., p. 121. For a critical discussion of the role of the Arya Samaj in Punjab (earlier cited), see Sarkar, \textit{Modern India}, pp. 74–76.
\textsuperscript{81} Vaid, \textit{The Broken Mirror}, p. 158.
in tempo and everyday life further embroiled in the disputes being enacted at the level of high politics. Eventually Beero moves to Lahore, where he lives for a year with his sister after her marriage to Naresh, a man who it emerges is involved in an affair with his own stepmother.\footnote{Vaid, The Broken Mirror, pp. 214–33.} A statement by a man during Beero’s train journey to Lahore to the effect that the poor will not get justice either in cities or in villages, in courts here or in His court and not even in Pakistan, exemplifies popular resistance to the logic of division.\footnote{Ibid., p. 204.} Yet even on this journey a quarrel erupts as regards the use of the communally inflammatory term ‘Musli’ to refer to a Muslim woman.\footnote{Ibid., p. 211.} Finally, it is the pain of a young boy suffering from an incurable disease that defuses communal tension and allows priorities to be temporarily set straight.\footnote{Ibid., p. 213.}

Towards the latter half of the novel, with the reality of Pakistan becoming more likely, the question of survival and the necessary compromises that a minority community might have to make in the face of the likely division of the country becomes the subject of a public discussion organised by Himmat Singh, for whom Gandhi, Nehru and Badshah Khan (the ‘Frontier Gandhi’) are the true leaders. The eccentric characters, including a quack, a wrestler and a prostitute, resist the call for the state of Pakistan made by a stranger who interrupts the proceedings and indulges in demagoguery. One of the eccentrics, the Emperor, tells the crowd that the fake mujahid was trying to provoke them and that those who speak venomously about other religions in the name of Islam are not people of God, nor of the holy Prophet.\footnote{Ibid., p. 268.} He makes the same criticism about those who do this in the name of Hinduism, although his speech deals mainly with the majority of Muslims in the town in which the discussion is taking place.\footnote{Ibid., p. 269.} After him Phalo rises to speak and reiterates women’s capacity for resistance to the idea of plundering and pillaging others, or taking revenge after violence committed elsewhere, as well as women’s ability to turn men from a given course. As someone who has had relationships across communal lines, she threatens to inform the wives of all the
leaders who were arousing bad passions about what they had been up to behind their wives’ backs, thus bringing in an element of the grotesque and a near-Aristophanic satirical thrust.89

Himmat Singh decides to follow Gandhi’s example in Noakhali and sets up a peace committee led by himself, the Emperor and Phalo.90 Beero has a vision of darkness at this point. Finally, the character nick-named In-Other-Words (or Yanike in the original, referred to at one point as the local Nietzsche) makes a speech in which he contrasts the actions of young boys like Beero and Keshav with the money-lenders and big landlords who yearn to grab wealth by exploiting the idea of Pakistan. In-Other-Words points out that the roots of communal riots are deep in the soil, enriched with fear, hatred and greed and that Pakistan is the culmination of long-standing weaknesses within society. He refers to the courage of Gandhi and others willing to stake all and puts forward several non-violent propositions that seem patently absurd.91 Such eccentric ideas may, nevertheless, seem to be the only counterweight to dominant ideologies that had their basis in continuing structural inequalities.

The subsequent outbreak of communal violence and mass slaughter is depicted from the point of view of Beero and his family, who attempt to hide even as rioting breaks out and mobs begin killing Hindus and Sikhs indiscriminately. The boy keeps his diary with him, which becomes his ‘fearful commentary’ on various people and things, a ‘map of his own hell’.92 Beero wonders about the possibility of forced circumcision and begins to believe that the memory of this night will always remain with him.93 There is fear regarding the fate of women who might be targeted during the violence, even as Beero acknowledges that various attempts by the peace committee to bring about peace and harmony had dismally failed.94 ‘God save us from the godly! All kinds of horrors are committed in His name’.95 The terror of the situation is captured with

89 Ibid., p. 273.
90 Ibid., pp. 274–76.
91 Ibid., pp. 281–89.
92 Ibid., p. 295.
93 Ibid., pp. 296, 298.
94 Ibid., p. 303.
95 Ibid., p. 303.
dramatic intensity and yet with a sense of proportion through the indirect mode of narration.

It is as if the memory of the witness arises along with the event in a perception of the likely phases through which violence progresses, which might even exceed Beero’s imagining. The boy as a ‘master imaginator’ is able to imagine the worst of the violence. He conceives of the deliberate intent to wipe out those from the ‘enemy’ community as well as the various steps taken to ensure the successful prosecution of their near genocidal intent by the leaders of communal violence: ‘No, this is worse than insanity…’.96 Beero takes a resolutely anti-religious stance, even as he begins wondering about procedures for tallying the dead.97 A digression follows in the form of a phantasmagoria in which facts and imagined realities are difficult to disentangle. It is almost as if the young boy has begun a descent into madness, haunted by memories of a living hell, and unable to retain a hold on the reality unfolding in front of him: ‘Or maybe it’s all for no purpose — just killing time amid mutilated people, isolated from their pain…’.98 Such displacements of self in temporal and spatial terms on account of catastrophic violence may be the most difficult to represent. The narrative evokes this difficulty through such digressions that suggest the extensive dislocation of given categories of perception and meaning.

The aftermath of violence is a period of shock and bewilderment as Bakka, the same man who raped and murdered other Hindus, rescues the family. Though the entire family survives after being transported to a refugee camp and sent to India, there is the possibility of Beero’s sister having been raped.99 Beero has various arguments with himself about the futility of revenge, as the extended interior monologue continues in the form of a muddied stream of consciousness.100 His mother recounts the atrocities committed in the form of a litany as she enumerates the various people killed (including the eccentrics).101 She utters their names as if in a

96 Ibid., pp. 303–6, 311.
97 Ibid., p. 312.
98 Ibid., p. 330.
99 Ibid., p. 336.
100 Ibid., p. 338.
101 A discussion with the author helped clarify ideas presented here.
horrific yet monotonous dirge for the dead.\textsuperscript{102} The novel concludes with an allusion to Shakespeare’s \textit{Hamlet} and the scene at the end of the play when the stage is littered with corpses; there is a perceived resonance with the situation of refugees in a camp. The boy’s interior monologue ceases only when he observes an abandoned child sitting by himself and wailing, oblivious to the fact of independence. At this Beero sits down and is finally able to shed tears.\textsuperscript{103} The novel thus ends with a moment of partial catharsis after the grotesque parody of the ritual of coming of age endured by the young narrator, which leads him to the threshold of insanity. As Deschaumes and Ivekovic argue, the refugee is indeed ‘amputated from his biography’.\textsuperscript{104} ‘This can only be articulated in fragmentary form, as in the narrative above. The metaphor of being maimed does not lead here to narcissistic self-preoccupation, however; rather, after the phase of numbing, the possibility of extension of self is indicated in Beero’s final gesture.

Significantly, there is a conscious attempt to keep at bay the tendency to indulge in partisan explanations for communal violence or the rhetoric of blame. Rather, it is through the figures of the eccentrics as off-centre witnesses that Vaid criticises the destructive logic leading up to the partition. Furthermore, there is recognition of the difficulty of coming to terms with delayed, often phantasmal aftereffects of collective trauma. Beero’s dreams and the haunting counter-images generated by his capacity to imagine allow for a revisiting of disturbing childhood memories that are not wholly comprehended at the time but which must be engaged with to allow for the possibility of historical witnessing. The novel achieves this, as in Caruth’s account, through the double telling of the unbearable tale of survival as well as the unbearable story of such a symbolic death—of formative ties and associations, as well as unfulfilled desires.\textsuperscript{105} Vaid’s novel deploys formal innovations and reflexive narrative techniques that render unprecedented experiences in oblique ways, suggesting rather than explicitly describing the horrors of near-genocidal massacres. However, unlike Desai’s novel, in which music allows for the partial restoration of a sense of redemptive

\textsuperscript{102} Vaid, \textit{The Broken Mirror}, p. 341–42.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., pp. 342–43.
\textsuperscript{104} Deschaumes and Ivekovic eds. ‘Preface’ in \textit{Divided Cities}, p. viii.
\textsuperscript{105} See Caruth, \textit{Unclaimed Experience}, pp. 7–8.
temporality at the end, Vaid’s bleak conclusion allows us to infer and become witnesses in turn to the devastating effects of the most unspeakable kinds of violence, including the likely persistence of the ‘time of partition’ into the future.

**Witness Accounts and the Ethics of Remembrance**

In the previous discussion the primary focus was on significant novels of the 1980s that engaged with the delayed effects of the historical trauma of the partition and the difficulty of representing its effects in fictional form. More recently, feminist scholars such as Urvashi Butalia (1998), Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (1998, 2002), Ritu Menon (2003) and Veena Das (1995, 1997, 2006) initiated different projects to reinvestigate the history of the partition. Shail Mayaram (1997), Javeed Alam and Suresh Sharma (1998), Ashis Nandy (2001) and Meenakshie Verma (2004) have also contributed to the debate dealing with the recovery of memory through witness accounts. In the 1990s, Butalia, Menon and Bhasin and Das generated important debates about silences in mainstream history writing as they revisited the history of partition through stories and memories elicited through interviews. In this section I discuss some of these positions, especially with reference to the debate about the ethics of remembrance, which I argue has a bearing on the question of representing the historical trauma of 1947 in literature.

In the introduction to *The Other Side of Silence*, Butalia herself refers to the problematic aspects of her project, especially the decision to work with memory, which, as she points out, is never pure nor unmediated. For Butalia, the questions regarding who remembers what, and when and who narrates a particular experience to whom and how, are crucial. The 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom in Delhi prompted Butalia’s own engagement with memories of the partition, which seemed to have been rekindled by the repetition of violence against the Sikh community. She self-consciously adopts the methodology of oral history to arrive at certain conclusions about family as well as community memory of the partition based on interviews she conducted.106 One of the most moving accounts

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Witnessing Partition

is of the women of the village Thoa Khalsa, eighty of whom jumped into a well during the Rawalpindi violence of March 1947.107

Butalia makes the important point that the reluctance to re-member does not only have to do with the horrific nature of events during the partition but rather, also with the people’s own complicity in this history. Virtually every family had a history of being both victims and aggressors in the violence. This may have been one of the major reasons for the wish not to remember the partition publicly, except within the family where the ‘ugly’ parts of the history could be suppressed. Butalia’s decision to focus on the stories of the smaller, often invisible participants, ordinary people, women, children and scheduled castes, followed from her interest in confronting not only the texts and memories then produced, but also people’s reluctance to remember.108 According to her, the tools of oral history are problematic but nevertheless do stretch the definitions and boundaries of history to make space for the small and the individual voice. As she suggests, the narratives of oral history flow above, below and through the disciplinary narratives of history and offer a way of turning the historical lens to a somewhat different angle in order to look at what this perspective offers. She argues that oral narratives thus offer an important perspective on history, which enriches the discipline.

Butalia also emphasises the clear differences in the speech of men and women and raises the question of whether there is such a thing as a gendered telling of partition. Butalia acquired the technique (alluded to by many oral historians) of learning to listen differently, often listening to the hidden nuance and the half-said thing and silence more eloquent than speech (especially when men were present). During her research, she discovered the ways in which women located this major event in the minor keys of their lives. Unlike men who mostly spoke about the relations between communities and the broad political realities, women spoke of the minutiae of experience, of the children lost and killed.109 Butalia also acknowledges the power relation between the interviewer and those being interviewed and the troubling awareness of the fact that subjects recede further into the background as the research

107 Ibid., pp. 166–74.
108 Ibid., pp. 8–10.
progresses. She admits to lacunae in her work insofar as she did not have access to information about the partition in Bengal in the East, or regarding information about the partition in Pakistan, except through her uncle, who stayed back after converting to Islam.\textsuperscript{110}

Unlike Butalia, Menon and Bhasin do review the political history of the partition before sketching the ground for their own investigation, explicitly focusing on the experience of women and violence against women.\textsuperscript{111} They point out that official memory is only one of many types of memories, and different sorts of telling revealed different sorts of truths. The ‘fragment’ is significant according to Menon and Bhasin precisely because it is marginal rather than mainstream, particular (even individual) rather than general, and because it presents history from below. According to them, the perspective such materials offer can lead to insights into how history is made and what gets inscribed, as well as offer directions to an alternative reading of the master-narrative. At their most subversive such fragments counter the rhetoric of nationalism itself and enable a rewriting of this narrative. Menon and Bhasin point to the absence of a feminist historiography of the partition of India, even of the ‘compensatory’ variety.\textsuperscript{112} In their terms, the story of 1947 is a gendered narrative of displacement and dispossession, of large-scale and widespread communal violence and the realignment of family, community and national identities, as the people were forced to accommodate the dramatically altered reality that now prevailed. Menon and Bhasin argue for the need for a movement from ‘compensatory’ to ‘contributory’ history and finally to a reconceptualisation of history in methodological terms. They make the case not only for the addition of new categories to inform our understanding of historical processes but also for a history of the dialectical relations between men and women in history.\textsuperscript{113}

Menon and Bhasin also indicate problems with the historical archive where women are largely absent, pointing to the strengths of partition literature as a source of information regarding the social history of the partition. For them, fiction is a richer source

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., pp. 16–17.
\textsuperscript{111} Bhasin and Menon, \textit{Borders}, pp. 8–10.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
of information about women’s voices, since in the case of fiction, women do occasionally ‘speak for themselves’. However, the most useful material for Menon and Bhasin was the first-hand accounts and memoirs by women social workers involved in the rehabilitation of women and oral testimony obtained from women in *ashrams* and refugee camps in Punjab and Haryana, the field of their research.\(^{114}\) They show how differentials in terms of class and material inequality between the researcher and the subject may skew findings. The nature of empathy established during an interview, as well as problems with reference to accuracy and fidelity to the letter and spirit of the narrative are shown to be crucial as well. Menon and Bhasin discuss the important question of confidentiality of sources, even while remaining committed to social transformation, with respect to the life stories of such women.\(^{115}\) Certain themes emerged in the process of their work with witness accounts: violence, abduction and recovery, widowhood, women’s rehabilitation, rebuilding, and belonging.\(^{116}\) They go on to analyse the way in which the abducted women figured in the nationalist debates following the partition and the appropriation of women’s sexuality at various levels in the representation of the significance of the event of the partition.\(^{117}\)

Javeed Alam and Suresh Sharma further problematise the project of recovery of memory of the partition in an important dialogue that appeared in an important dialogue that appeared in an issue of *Seminar* magazine (461, 1998). Alam argues that while the attempt to recover the voices of the marginalised by going back to the people has been an impetus for social scientists, in the case of the partition survivors it is difficult to make a distinction between the perpetrator and the victim in

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\(^{114}\) Ibid., pp. 11–12.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., p. 15.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., p. 19.

\(^{117}\) In her work Veena Das further extends this analysis of notions of purity and pollution and shame and honour prevalent in Punjabi society, and the social consequences for such abducted women. Das cogently analyses the ways in which recovery processes initiated by the state impinged upon practical notions of kinship, showing us the ambivalences and ironies of rehabilitation procedures premised on nationalist assumptions. See Das, *Critical Events*, pp. 55–83. Also see Bhasin and Menon, *Borders*, pp. 20–21, 65–131.
absolute terms, since they are often one and the same. The same people who were victims at a given place would participate in the killings at another place. Sharma accepts this, criticising the valorisation of the victim in many of these accounts. Unlike the case of Christians conquering Spain after centuries of Moorish rule and wiping the country clean of Muslim presence, and the North African situation where Christians were eliminated, in India there was a blurring of boundaries. Large-scale expulsions took place and ethnic cleansing did happen, but small communities of Christians and Hindus are still to be found in Pakistan and Bangladesh and many Muslims still live in India. Partition was thus a blurred achievement. This reminds Alam of the many instances of people helping those from the other community during the violence. However, such instances were outnumbered by far by episodes of horrific brutality. He quotes a statement by Krishna Sobti to the effect that the partition is difficult to forget but dangerous to remember. His suspicion is that the effort to map the limits of violence by asking people to recall what they went through, to recount the trauma, is morally unsustainable.

Sharma underlines the need to be sensitive to the distinctive nature of our civilisational ground and what a project of recovering memory may do to this. According to him, memory itself subsumes both remembrance and forgetting and is inconceivable as an act of total remembrance. Indeed, this quest for total remembrance is misplaced and dangerous. Alam makes a further distinction between the process of interviewing survivors and psychotherapy, where the victim voluntarily presents himself or herself to the analyst, who through a long dialogue effects a cure by drawing out the repressed side of the experience, achieving a process of transference. On the contrary, in his view, the interviewer chases the victim and draws him out by pushing him back into a forgotten memory. Alam draws attention to the political consideration that for communities to be able to coexist there must be a forgetting of the most traumatic events of the past as well as an acceptance

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119 Ibid., pp. 99–100.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., p. 100.
of equal responsibility. Unlike state-sponsored violence, according to him, during the partition at the moment of loss of sanity people began killing each other. It was not deserving of systematic recollection since this kind of memory should be left behind.\textsuperscript{122} This assertion, of course, needs to be qualified in the light of work such as that done by Hansen and Jalal that amply demonstrate the role of large organisations operating like civil militias during massacres that therefore cannot be merely attributed to ‘loss of sanity’.\textsuperscript{123}

For Alam, the presence of a state as the perpetrator is a critical factor.\textsuperscript{124} As he argues it is right, even morally necessary, to institutionalise the memory of the Holocaust. People must thus be reminded of the threat that such fascist organisations pose.\textsuperscript{125} Sharma makes the rather different case that the principle that not everything need be remembered all the time must be kept in mind. For him, the memory of evil provides an assurance that we will not allow it to be repeated in any form. However, rather than recommending that we forget the terrible events, he argues against the project of total recovery of memory, which might lead to an erosion of equations of sanity. He acknowledges that it was easier to institutionalise the memory of the Holocaust because of this clear separation between victim and victimiser.\textsuperscript{126} Also, the state

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 101.


\textsuperscript{124} As Mayaram’s work on the ethnic cleansing or ‘safaya’ of the Meos of Alwar and Bharatpur states shows in contrast, there was a considerable degree of state involvement. Airplanes and the army were deployed to destroy or drive out the Meos. See Mayaram, \textit{Resisting Regimes}, pp. 162–220.

\textsuperscript{125} See Alam and Sharma, ‘Remembering Partition’, p. 102. Pandey, in a more recent intervention, criticises Alam’s (Marxist) position for falling back on history centred on the state and large organisations, also taking Sharma to task for making an ‘exceptionalist’ argument as regards the Indian historical and civilisational experience based on a notion of inherent ‘pluralism’. See Pandey, \textit{Remembering Partition}, pp. 58–66.

\textsuperscript{126} Primo Levi’s earlier cited description of the ‘grey zone’ inhabited by privileged members of the concentration camps, especially the kapos, as well as the Sonderkommando who operated the ovens where the victims were gassed, has problematised such absolute distinctions in the case of Auschwitz as well. See Levi, \textit{The Drowned}, pp. 22–52.
as an abstract entity could be clearly identified as responsible. The lack of such a clear distinction in the case of partition victims and victimisers, which may be the same collective, the same identity, makes such externalisation unavailable.\textsuperscript{127} Alam reiterates the dangers of focusing on the recovery of the memory of partition violence with reference to growing communal consciousness, which this may feed into.\textsuperscript{128} Alam’s argument may be criticised for making an overly sharp distinction between the two events, disregarding evidence of blurring of boundaries in the case of collaborators with the Nazis during the ‘final solution’. However, as argued earlier, there was indeed a qualitative difference between the two experiences of blurring of boundaries. While the coercive regime of the Nazi state apparatus led to occasional situations of complicity and the emergence of the ‘grey zone’ in the death camps, there was a large-scale tendency to participate in revenge killings amongst victim communities during the partition, especially in the Punjab on both sides of the border during reciprocal violence. Furthermore, one may note the appearance of perverse modes of quasi-sacrificial violence based on a perception of possible contamination by the other in the violence during the partition as well.\textsuperscript{129} There is thus a need for analysis that is attentive to specificity and local detail, in both historical accounts and fictional representation.

In defence of her position in a subsequent issue of \textit{Seminar} (463, 1998), Butalia argues for the importance of recovery of memory, given that the experience of women, children and Dalits have not been adequately dealt with through historical analyses of the partition.\textsuperscript{130} Indeed, she suggests that Alam overplays the dangers of this kind of recovery of memory and that it is indeed through negotiation of this memory that we may be able to get past the kind of resurgent communal consciousness which in the first place motivated her to undertake her study. As she points out, many of

\textsuperscript{127} Alam and Sharma, ‘Remembering Partition’, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 103.
\textsuperscript{129} Also see LaCapra’s discussion of the debates as regards revisionist histories of the Holocaust. As he shows, Hitler may have had a paranoid fear about contamination by Jewish blood, which may have intensified the quasi-sacrificial and distorted scapegoating that followed. See LaCapra, \textit{History and Memory}, pp. 43–72 especially p. 58.
the interviewees were themselves old and at the last stage of their lives, necessitating the extra care and urgency with which many of the discussions with them were held. She also rebuts the charge that her work in oral history sought to replace conventional history with ‘memory’. Rather, Butalia emphasises the differentiated nature of memory, especially that of pain and suffering, which must be dealt with and represented in a responsible way so as to allow for the process of forgetting to begin.\(^{131}\)

Butalia takes issue with the discussants regarding whether stories and memoirs of the partition that have been in circulation might be regarded as less potentially inflammatory than interview based recollections. In her account, such stories are based on personal recollection in any case, thus equally susceptible to misuse.\(^{132}\) This equation of the effects of witness accounts and fiction is somewhat misleading, however, and tends to efface differences between the various kinds of ‘stories’. Imaginative writing, I contend, does engage with precisely pain and suffering at the individual as well as collective level which the discussants and Butalia are concerned with, but does so in a different register, often through a reordering of temporality. Significant fictions often seek to transmute memory after a detour through the imagination so as to allow for sustained reflection on both the particular as well as the totality. The best stories of Manto and Intizar Husain and the novels of Sahni, Hosain, Husain, Hussein, Desai and Vaid exemplify this form of engagement. Furthermore, unlike most witness accounts, which often focus on personal experiences of loss, such imaginative representations at times also negotiate the damage done to the collective imagination and memory by the destructive impact of the cataclysmic event. Indeed, as LaCapra suggests, extremely traumatic events beggar the imagination, as they involve the literalisation of metaphor, even as one’s wildest dreams or most hellish nightmares seem to be realised or surpassed by brute facts.\(^{133}\) Indeed, such facts may at times go beyond the imagination’s powers of representation. LaCapra argues that as phantasms run riot in everyday life, the imagination may seem to become superfluous, since such

\(^{131}\) Ibid.

\(^{132}\) Ibid.

\(^{133}\) LaCapra, *History and Memory*, pp. 180–81.
events cannot be intensified through recreation or transfiguration.\textsuperscript{134} This may entail the reinvention of the notion of testimony to accommodate a perception of gaps and silences and displacements in time and space in order to counter the force of the past. Indeed, the idea of bearing witness for those who may have suffered more, who may even belong to the ‘other’ community, may need to be articulated in such testimony, as a mode of proxy witnessing in Levi’s terms.\textsuperscript{135}

While witness-based accounts have indeed enabled an unsettling of the assumptions of nationalist historiography and the exclusions such histories were often based upon, Alam and Sharma’s caution regarding need for vigilance while undertaking such recovery of memory remains salient. While Alam’s standpoint can seem at times summarily dismissive of feminist claims as regards the role of oral history, Sharma’s nuanced argument reminds us of the need to come to terms with civilisational modes of being that partition violence impinged upon. Indeed, the extent of falling away from earlier modalities of coexistence as well as ways of resolving disputes and dealing with seemingly irreconcilable positions remains to be mapped. Sharma, in an argument that I agree with, underlines literature’s role as a mode of remembrance of cultural/civilisational resources and as a medium for dialogue and exchange.\textsuperscript{136} However, the question of whether South Asian civilisational principles might truly ensure the balance between remembrance and forgetting to be achieved even without such efforts in the sphere of oral history remains moot, especially given Nandy’s contention that such memories continue to circulate in a culture of silence in the form of private and shared fantasies that are selectively reconfigured, imperceptibly influencing the public life of the region.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., p. 181.
\textsuperscript{135} Levi, \textit{The Drowned}, pp. 22–64.
\textsuperscript{137} See Nandy, \textit{Ambiguous Journey}, p. 110. Also see Nonica Datta’s recounting of the testimony of the daughter of a Sikh perpetrator who was then killed, and whose ‘martyrdom’ became the pretext for the wiping out
Lahore Burns Afresh

A more recent strand of partition writing draws quite explicitly on family history and oral accounts. The placement of an eyewitness account in the middle of a narrative, however, brings up key questions as regards claims to authority of such ‘documentary’ figurations of testimony. *Ice Candy Man* (1988) by Parsi writer of Pakistani origin Bapsi Sidhwa illustrates potential pitfalls of fictional recuperation of memory in this form. Sidhwa had earlier touched upon the violence during the partition in her novel *The Pakistani Bride* (1983), in which there is a brief reference to the killings on the trains that took place during the partition, as well as to revengeful Sikhs killing Muslims (14–19). However, in *Ice Candy Man* Sidhwa tackles the subject of the partition more directly. The story is narrated from the point of view of the protagonist, Lenny, a Parsi child with a physical disability, a limp due to a polio attack when she was young. Lenny observes growing communal tension in the city of Lahore in which she lives, especially as manifested in the experience of her *ayah*, an attractive young Hindu woman who is courted by aspirants from different communities and religious backgrounds. The most persistent is the ice candy man, a Muslim vendor who pays special attention to Lenny of the Muslims of his village. Such rationalisations of massacres are still alive in public and private memories, as this narrative shows. See Nonica Datta, ‘Partition Memories: A Daughter’s Testimony’ in Hasan and Nariaki eds., *The Unfinished Agenda*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2001, pp. 17–48.

Sidhwa was born in Karachi and grew up in Lahore. Her novels *The Crow Eaters* (1980), dealing with the experience of the Parsi community, and *The Pakistani Bride* (1983) were published before *Ice Candy Man*. She teaches in the United States and lives part of the year in Pakistan. See biographical note, *Ice Candy Man*. Sidhwa has edited a collection of writings on Lahore. See Sidhwa, *City of Splendour*.

Sidhwa herself suffered from polio as a child. However, Sidhwa has rejected autobiographical readings of the novel. See Didur, *Unsettling Partition*, pp. 70. Yusin and Bahri allude to readings that argue that Lenny’s broken body allegorically refers to the breaking of Pakistan from India, and the story of a broken nation. See Jennifer Yusin and Deepika Bahri, ‘Writing Partition: Trauma and Testimony in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*’ in Roy and Bhatia eds., *Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement and Resettlement*, pp. 86–87.
as a means of winning the ayah’s favour. The shift in the perceptions of self of the different suitors who used to sit together in the park as they begin to think of identity exclusively in terms of religious community is dramatised through the child’s point of view.

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, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah, she is also a token. A Hindu. (Sidhwa, *Ice Candy Man*, pp. 88–93).

The problem with this self-conscious, post-facto rendering of the effects of processes of enumeration and hardening of identities is that the ‘fictive’ criticism itself slips into tokenism, even as the narrative drifts away from the tone of naïveté in Lenny’s account. For instance, issues relating to political history fleetingly appear in conversations overheard by Lenny, such as during the interaction over dinner between Inspector General Rogers and Mr. Singh, who refers to the number of Sikh recruits who fought on behalf of the British during the Second World War and his determination to achieve Swaraj. The men begin to quarrel on account of Rogers’ tactless denunciation of the Akalis. The episode replicates the commonplace caricature of the Sikh as lacking in self-restraint, fiery and prone to sudden outbursts of violence. Such a pattern of falling back on stereotypes can be consistently discerned. This may indicate Sidhwa’s inability to distance her narrative from dominant frames of perception.

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140 The Unionist Party backed mobilisation for the army as more than 800,000 combatants were recruited from the Punjab, and 25 crores raised through war loans and donations. This also contributed to the militarisation of Punjabi society. See Tan and Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition*, p. 217.

141 Sidhwa, *Ice Candy Man*, pp. 60–65. As Didur shows, though Sidhwa claims objectivity for Lenny’s account as a by-product of her location in the Parsi community, it is possible to detect the Parsi community’s sympathy with colonial culture in this narrative. Didur’s critical discussion of the particularities of Parsi experience in Pakistan and the community’s propensity towards elitism and solipsism is pertinent. See Didur, *Unsettling Partition*, pp. 74–77.

142 Indeed, Sidhwa juggles cavalierly with dates and facts in other sections of the novel, often relying on Pakistani nationalist accounts for
One of the reasons for this may be the relative absence of Sikhs in Pakistan after 1947 and the continued prevalence of images from the past of Sikhs as killers. The economy of the stereotype of the ‘other’ in Pakistan thus differs from that in India where the presence of Muslims in everyday life might both dissipate and reinforce the deployment of such stereotypes. Sidhwa’s fictional use of the well-known inflammatory and desperate speech by Master Tara Singh outside the steps of the Punjab assembly chambers confirms this pattern of representing Sikhs as inherently militant and volatile in nature. Subsequently, the arson attacks in Lahore are presented as a lurid spectacle viewed by Lenny and the ayah after the ice candy man takes them to the roof. Well-known incidents such as the burning of areas in which Hindus and Sikhs had stockpiled arms, after which huge explosions followed, are explicitly referred to as a ‘tamasha’ or show and compared to a gigantic fireworks display. Rather than any sense of the tragic failure of Lahore to live up to its long-standing image of being a sanctuary where people from surrounding areas could take refuge during times of crisis (especially after the extreme forms of violence in August–September, 1947), here we have the spectacle of the dismembered city.

Although the intention may be to criticise the voyeurism of the ice candy man and his band, who relish this spectacle and exult her rendering of political history. The novel locates the Salt Satyagraha in the wrong decade, in one instance (Sidhwa, *Ice Candy Man*, pp. 35–36). Krishna Kumar’s comparison of school textbook histories illustrates biases in nationalist accounts influencing frames of popular perception on both sides. See K. Kumar, *Prejudice and Pride*, pp. 29–69. Sidhwa later justifies her ridiculing of Gandhi by referring to the Parsi sense of humour; she became ‘rambunctious’, also in reaction to the portrayal of Gandhi in Attenborough’s film. This does not extend to Jinnah, however, whom she felt needed to be rescued from the caricatures in media representations. See Bhalla, ‘Grief and Survival in *Ice Candy Man*: In Conversation with Bapsi Sidhwa’ in *Partition Dialogues*, pp. 229–31.


Sidhwa, *Ice Candy Man*, p. 133.

Ibid., pp. 135–37.
as their side succeeds in further demonstrating its destructive power, there is an unwitting tendency to slip back into a mode of narration in which violence and its graphic presentation in all its horrors becomes perversely an object of consumption. The child tears one of her dolls apart in an act of pointless brutality, as if ‘acting out’ the violence omnipresent in the vicinity.\textsuperscript{146} There is a description of the extension of the time of violence in the child’s memory and the consequent need for ‘poetic license’, leading on to the appallingly clichéd line, ‘And the hellish fires of Lahore spawn monstrous mobs’.\textsuperscript{147} A few lines later follows the tired attribution of the logic behind this violence, apportioned to the British gods led by Cyril Radcliff (sic), who deal their pack of cards. ‘I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that’.\textsuperscript{148} The whimsicality of this perception of nationality being won as if in a game of cards reinforces the sense of a mismatch between the levity of the child–narrator’s tone and the transfiguration amidst a bloodbath earlier described.

‘Ranna’s story’, which Sidhwa acknowledges as being drawn from the childhood memories of a source now based in the USA., is braided into the fictional narrative, otherwise narrated from the point of view of the ‘neutral’ Parsi narrator.\textsuperscript{149} However, the insertion of this witness account into the novelistic rendering of the partition is problematic.\textsuperscript{150} While this section seemingly offers a different

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., pp. 138. Yusin and Bahri read this episode differently, suggesting that this is Lenny’s attempt to not only act out a violent fantasy, but also experience the trauma of violence in the present. Their reading slides too easily from individual trauma to collective trauma, and does not address the problematic use of communal stereotypes in the novel. See Yusin and Bahri, ‘Writing Partition’, pp. 82–98. Also see criticism of the tendency in trauma theory to uncritically slide between individual experience and collective processes in Das, \textit{Life and Words}, pp. 102–3.

\textsuperscript{147} Sidhwa, \textit{Ice Candy Man}, p. 139.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., p. 140.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., pp. 195–208.

\textsuperscript{150} As James Young points out with reference to Holocaust fiction, by placing fictional characters within actual events, the writer absolves herself from the need for historical accuracy, invoking poetic license even as she imbues fiction with the historical authority of real events. ‘By inviting this ambiguity, the writer of documentary fiction would thus move the reader with the pathos created in the rhetoric of historically authentic characters…’ See Young, ‘Holocaust Documentary Fiction: The Novelist as Eyewitness’, in Lang ed. \textit{Writing and the Holocaust}, pp. 202–3.
point of view and is narrated from the perspective of a Muslim boy, it is as if ‘Ranna’s story’ becomes a vehicle for articulating residual anxieties about the Sikhs. The witness account is dramatised in a way that further reinforces communal/ethnic stereotypes about the savagery and bestiality of Sikhs.151 ‘The Sikhs were among them like hairy vengeful devils, wielding bloodied swords, dragging them out as a sprinkling of Hindus, darting about at the fringes, their faces vaguely familiar, pointed out and identified the Musalmans by name.’152 Furthermore, phrases like ‘murderous Sikh mobs’ abound.153 While it is important not to understate the extent of the violence directed against Muslims in East Punjab, for any writer to fall back on communal stereotypes of Sikhs as ‘tall men with streaming hair and thick biceps and thighs, waving full-sized swords and sten-guns, roaring “Bolay So Nihal! Sat Sri Akal!”’ soon after the 1984 killings is certainly insensitive and indicative of a failure to empathise with victims from the Sikh community, a community recently traumatised again.154 The narrative returns to Lenny’s point of view after this section, which features a no-holds barred itemisation of brutality, including images such as the smashing of babies against walls, familiar from narratives about the ‘Final Solution’.155 Rather than a dialogic interplay of perspectives, it seems as if ‘Ranna’s story’ is subsumed too easily into the narrator’s perspective.

Furthermore, the passage of time noted by Butalia above may have influenced this narration of childhood experience of violence during the partition in unpredictable ways.156 The parallel drawn

151 Sidhwa later claimed that Penderel Moon’s Divide and Quit was the source for her sense of the Sikhs as especially brutal. See Bhalla, ‘Grief and Survival’, p. 234.
152 Sidhwa, Ice Candy Man, p. 201.
153 Ibid., p. 207.
154 Ibid., p. 199. For an exemplary account of survivor trauma in the wake of the 1984 pogrom, and the difficulties faced while working with Sikh riot victims during relief work, especially with regard to the incoherence of survivors ‘numbed’ by collective violence and the tendency to pathological forms of mourning amongst survivors, see Das, ‘Our Work to Cry’, pp. 345–98.
155 Sidhwa, Ice Candy Man, p. 207.
156 Also see Agamben’s caution as regards aestheticisation of testimony. See Agamben, Remnants of Auschwitz, pp. 35–36.
here between the Holocaust and the Muslim experience in East Punjab risks falling into the trap that Alam warns against of over-emphasising the surface resemblance between the Holocaust and the partition.\(^{157}\) Lenny’s recurrent nightmare about a Nazi soldier coming to get her seems to make this connection more plausible (especially since Lenny and the Muslim boy Ranna are portrayed as close childhood friends).\(^ {158}\) The narrative slides from this image of Nazi terror to a description of Ranna’s experiences as a victim, without taking on board the crucial differences in historical context cited earlier. Yusin and Bahri, instead, read this image as a fractured referent to the Holocaust trauma, suggesting the status of the partition as historical trauma.\(^ {159}\) Rather, the image suggests a melancholic fixation with horror, and a conflation of different kinds of violence to aggrandise a collective victim-identity. The portrayal of Lenny’s later guilt as regards the abduction of her Hindu ayah, which she inadvertently assists in through her revelation of her whereabouts to the ice candy man, does mitigate this tendency somewhat, as there is an acknowledgement of culpability.\(^ {160}\)

\(^{157}\) Alam and Sharma, ‘Remembering Partition’, p. 102.

\(^{158}\) Sidhwa, *Ice Candy Man*, p. 22. Friedlander suggests that the morbid fascination with Nazism may be due to the juxtaposition, within the representation of Nazism, of the warmth of the herd and its expression in varied forms of kitsch sentimentality, with fantasies of apocalyptic destruction. See Friedlander, ‘Historical Writing and the Memory of the Holocaust’ in Lang ed. *Writing and the Holocaust*, pp. 66–77. Also see Bartov’s discussion of Ka-Tzetnik’s *Salamandra Sextet* about the Holocaust, of which vol. 2, *The House of the Dolls* represents experiences of sexual enslavement in the camps. The Sextet, with its sado-masochistic descriptions of violence, circulated underground in Israel before becoming part of the Holocaust canon. Such writings may, as in Ka-Tzetnik’s case, have inadvertently contributed to the development of a siege mentality and at times precipitated a repetition of such horrors, as Bartov suggests, with reference to the possibility that some Israeli soldiers brought up on a diet of such near pornographic descriptions of life in the concentration camps later played out the fantasy of being the aggressor in their treatment of Palestinian prisoners. See Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide and Modern Identity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 187–212.

\(^{159}\) Yusin and Bahri, ‘Writing Partition’, p. 90.

\(^{160}\) Sidhwa, *Ice Candy Man*, pp. 178–84. However, Lenny’s subsequent self-flagellation may also remind us of discussions of the phenomenon of survivor guilt. On Holocaust survivor testimony and the question of
At the novel’s end the ayah is recovered from the ice candy man’s home after Lenny’s grandmother’s intercession. She is eventually sent across the Wagah border, across which her abductor follows her on account of his obsessive desire. The ayah is likely to face the stigma of having been abducted, as well as the continued persecution of the ice candy man, though in a situation of greater vulnerability for him as a ‘moonstruck fakir’ who has, in a somewhat melodramatic transformation, completely changed character. This attempt to present the ice-candy man’s desire in a more salubrious light, however, has the effect of diluting the emphasis on the tragic fate of the ayah. Indeed, in Didur’s reading, there is ‘a consistent refusal to work through or otherwise resolve the traumas connected with the treatment of “abducted” women’ in the novel. The effort to redeem the ice candy man in conclusion by showing his somewhat clichéd attempt to transform ‘lust’ into ‘love’, through a penchant for quoting Urdu poetry risks normalising pathological forms of perverse desire (including necrophilia) manifested during the partition, a pitfall Manto steered clear of during his repeated engagements with such forms of sexual violence and crises of masculinity.

survivor guilt, see Langer, ‘Interpreting Survivor Testimony’, pp. 26–41. We may contrast this fictional representation of survivor guilt with the restrained depiction of the situation of Rosa Lublin, the protagonist of Cynthia Ozick’s ‘The Shawl’ who obsessively clings on to the shawl that is the sole memento of the daughter killed in the concentration camps, even years later in America. Her response to the traumatic loss of the daughter, whom she sheltered for as long as she could in the camps hidden in the shawl, is to curse the world, rather than acknowledge the need for reconciliation. I am indebted to Alok Bhalla for this reference.

161 Sidhwa, Ice Candy Man, pp. 276–77.
162 Didur, Unsettling Partition, p. 88.
163 See Gopal, Literary Radicalism, p. 105. In another context, the descriptions of extreme yet normalised violence in everyday life in villages in Eastern Europe, especially with respect to outsiders such as Jews and gypsies, in Kosinski’s The Painted Bird are a case in point. Such representations of the ‘normality’ of grisly forms of everyday violence in Eastern Europe elide the specificity of Nazi genocidal violence, which emerges as not so different from earlier instances of anti-Semitic violence as well as other forms of violence intrinsic to the human condition in this account. This becomes even more problematic when one considers the
Sidhwa’s invocation of the authority of an eyewitness account raises the question of what constitutes the authority of such an account and gives it weight.164 As earlier argued, the tendency to fall back on stereotypes based on phantasmal memories of Sikhs as killers undermines the narrative’s implicit claim to testimonial status. While this is undoubtedly an instance of the ambiguity of ‘documentary fiction’ (in Young’s terms), there is a further risk that such shallow resolutions (as in the ice candy man’s change of heart and transformation into a fakir-poet at the novel’s end) may actually disable the role fiction might play as a mode of surrogate testimony or critical witnessing.165 Indeed, in such writing one may discern what Ghosh, citing the Bosnian writer Dzevad Karahasan, refers to as an aestheticising impulse that disallows the possibility of a responsible, ethical engagement with the memory of violence.166

### Third Generation Identity Politics in the Diaspora

One may discern similar problems in the case of the Canadian expatriate of Indian origin Shauna Singh Baldwin’s emphasis on an exclusively Sikh and gendered memory of the partition in fact that claims to have experienced such violence as a child were made by Kosinski, later shown not to be true. See Myers, ‘Rev. of “A Life Beyond Repair: Jerzy Kosinski: A Biography by J. P. Sloan”’, Leadership U.14 Feb. 2005, <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9610/myers.html>.


165 Bahri’s and Kabir’s discussions of the novel seem to be insufficiently critical, especially with respect to the use of stereotypes. See Bahri, ‘Telling Tales’, pp. 217–34 and Kabir, ‘Gender, Trauma’, pp. 177–90.

Ethnic particularity and a narrowly defined sense of community and gender identity seem to take over the narration of the partition experience, limiting the field of perception and leading to tokenism. The Sikhs, especially their women, are presented as the ‘real’ victims of partition, though the violence against women of other communities is briefly alluded to as well. While the difficult situation of the Sikh community at the time is undeniable, the problem with this narrative lies in the identitarian emphasis that leads to the reinforcement of communal stereotypes, and a refusal to acknowledge culpability.\footnote{Shauna Singh Baldwin was born in Montreal and grew up in India. She now lives in Milwaukee, Canada. See biographical note, Baldwin, \textit{What the Body Remembers}, New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1999.}

In the first part of the novel Arya Samaj followers in Gujarkhan take a retired military man’s son who was going to join the Sikh Regiment to the temple, where his turban is opened and the knot of hair forcibly cut off in order to return him to ‘\textit{shuddhi}’.\footnote{As Tan and Kudaisya suggest, the implications of a partition in the Punjab on the basis of contiguous areas of Muslim and non-Muslim districts as provided by the 3 June plan were horrendous for the Sikhs. Concentrated in the central divisions of Lahore and Jullundur, they would be split down the middle, with Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Multan, districts with half a million Sikhs, the fertile lands of Montgomery, Lyallpur and Guru Nanak’s birthplace going to Pakistan. Their analysis brings out well the sense of vulnerability in the Sikh community in these months. See Tan and Kudaisya, \textit{The Aftermath of Partition}, pp. 116–17.} In many Punjabi Hindu families it had indeed been the practice for the first-born boy to become a Sikh. The narrative overstates the extent to which such practices may have come under threat with the Arya Samaj emphasis on ‘purification’ of Hinduism.\footnote{Baldwin, \textit{What the Body Remembers}, p. 57.} Baldwin makes a glaring error when she has her protagonist Roop’s father Papaji translate the term ‘\textit{shuddhi}’ as the Sanskrit word for ‘impure’, rather than pure.\footnote{Also see the earlier cited discussion of Arya Samaj proselytising, including Shuddhi and its impact in the Punjab in Sarkar, \textit{Modern India}, pp. 74–76. The Shuddhi movement’s primary concern was with ‘reconverting’ Muslims or Christians, though, rather than Sikhs.} This lack of acquaintance with terms that are well-known and require straightforward cross-referencing indicates a
certain failing at the level of research into details of the period. The rather melodramatic description of the coercive measures used by Arya Samajis is followed by the mistaken explanation offered by Papaji to his children (who do not understand the Sanskrit term). They are then forbidden to perform Hindu ceremonies or eat Muslim meat, as he engages in a counter-purification of his house through an *Akhand Path*). This sets the tone for the subsequent rationalisation of such identity assertions within the Sikh community, which are justified as reactive. The episode also discloses the retrospective tendency to assumption of a stance of victimhood in the community.

The novel depicts the children’s growing awareness of the logic of commensality and taboos against eating with Muslims, which the young Roop and her brother Jeevan accept as a matter of course. Sikh contributions to nationalist mobilisation and awareness are highlighted, such as the demonstration led by Master Tara Singh to protest when the British gunned down Pathan Muslims in Peshawar. In contrast, there is a fleeting reference to a ‘coalition party’ that makes a pact with the Muslim League, leading the Akalis to ally with the Indian National Congress. Previous fictional representations of Sikh history are referred to rather uncritically,

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172 Ibid., pp. 57–60.
173 For a nuanced discussion of the many differences at the level of ritual and practices within the Sikh community and the drive to homogenisation of the community in the nineteenth century, as well as the pitfalls of later attempts to base a historiography of Sikhism on such a homogenous model, see Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction*, especially Introduction, pp. 1–35. A recent collection of stories in translation from Punjabi includes short stories that acknowledge the violence done by the Sikhs, both within the community and against Muslims, as well as the need for remorse and guilt. See Anna Siecklucka and Sutinder Singh Noor eds. *Santalina: Partition Stories*, trans. Hina Nandrajog and Madhuri Chawla, Delhi: Punjabi Academy, 2005. I am indebted to Hina Nandrajog for this reference.
174 Baldwin, *What the Body Remembers*, p. 79.
175 Ibid., p.106.
176 This was, of course, the Unionist Party; its crucial role in Punjab politics is somewhat under-represented in the novel. The Punjab National Unionist Party represented a rural-military lobby that dominated Punjab politics till 1937. See Tan and Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of the Partition*, pp. 214–16. Also see Baldwin, *What the Body Remembers*, p. 154.
such as the novel by Bhai Vir Singh that Roop reads, in which the character of a Sikh woman who helps the Sikh men in their battle against the Afghans emerges as a martyr.\textsuperscript{177} Baldwin’s novel too seems to reiterate the idea of Sikh women as martyrs to historical wrongs.

The narrative relies on a somewhat simplistic notion of the gendered nature of experience, and neat binary oppositions between masculinity and femininity. For example, when Jeevan joins the army and teaches soldiers to fight he learns that it is not only Sikhs, Gurkhas and Marathas who can fight, as the English believe, but all men whose bodies remember humiliation and anger from this and past lives.\textsuperscript{178} This viewpoint as regards violence and the inherent propensity of men to respond violently to oppression is marked by essentialism and determinism, as is Baldwin’s notion of women’s suffering being remembered at the level of the body, and transmitted across the generations. In a later interview Baldwin links this notion of body memory with ideas of reincarnation in Indian mysticism that she claims to draw on.\textsuperscript{179}

The novel is structured around the relationships within the impoverished Sikh family of the protagonist Roop and her eventual marriage into the family of Sardarji, a wealthy British-educated irrigation engineer whose first wife Satya is unable to conceive. Baldwin later speaks of the allegorical nature of her tale, with the subsequent rivalry regarding Roop’s children between the two wives as a symbolic representation of the battle for supremacy amongst the religious communities even as the British prepare to leave.\textsuperscript{180} However, the allegory does not really work, since the narrative does not establish a convincing one-to-one correspondence between the tangled personal relationships within the family

\textsuperscript{177} Baldwin, \textit{What the Body Remembers}, p. 124. For a critical account of the activities of the Khalsa Tract Society set up by Bhai Vir Singh in 1894 along the model of missionary societies, and the tracts disseminated across Punjab written mostly by Bhai Vir Singh, see Oberoi, \textit{The Construction}, pp. 410–13.

\textsuperscript{178} Baldwin, \textit{What the Body Remembers}, p. 199.


\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
of Sardarji and the political/social tensions between different religious communities during this phase of history. The arrogance of the barren Satya, who treats the younger wife with malice as a mere vehicle to produce a male heir, ultimately leads to her downfall, as Sardarji is forced by Roop’s family to distance himself from her, despite his superior social position. Later, Satya’s melodramatic suicide after deliberately contracting tuberculosis removes her from the scene.\(^{181}\) At this point the younger wife whom she once threatened with violence not only forgives her, but also becomes the inheritor of her questioning spirit and manner, befitting her stature as Sardarji’s wife.\(^{182}\)

The use of the device of Sardarji’s British alter ego, Cunningham, a hidden self who speaks to him and argues with him on occasion, leads to an overemphasis on the duality between the elements of scientific rationality internalised by Sardarji and the reality of British colonial oppression, which leads to conflict within his mind and by extension, in Indian society. Sardarji’s ambitions are those of the Punjabi landed elite. He scrapes his way up the colonial hierarchy until he reaches the colonial equivalent of the glass ceiling, as his superior Mr. Farquharson expresses his views about the racial inferiority of Indians.\(^{183}\) Sardarji nurtures ambitions of designing and supervising the building of the Bhakra dam, which he eventually fulfils after surviving a harrowing journey on one of the trains with stolen maps of the irrigation system in West Punjab. The reconciliation of the opposed elements of the ‘divided self’ is achieved rather too easily at the end, one might argue.

In the depiction of interactions between the British and the Indians the British are uniformly shown to be condescending and patronising, sneering at the Indians’ incapacity to manage their affairs. The stereotype of the obtuse British ruler is matched by the stereotype of the intransigent Muslim (such as Sardarji’s friend Rai Alam Khan, unwilling to compromise, given his convictions).\(^{184}\) Meanwhile, the Sikhs organise themselves, especially after the

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\(^{181}\) Baldwin, *What the Body Remembers*, pp. 369–70.

\(^{182}\) Ibid., pp. 380–81.

\(^{183}\) Ibid., p. 213.

\(^{184}\) Ibid., pp. 387–94.
Rawalpindi violence of March 1947 in which many of them were killed. The formation of self-defence squads amongst the Sikhs is represented in a heroic mode, with the Sardarji realising for the first time his political responsibilities, prompted partly by a vivid apprehension as regards his land and properties. Ultimately, when the violence breaks out Sikhs are shown to be largely at the receiving end, and the self-destructive violence that follows is shown to be the inevitable but tragic corollary of the codes of honour that prevail in the community. An element of the lurid creeps into the description of horrific violence meted out upon their women by Sikh men in order to safeguard their chastity when the attacks began.

There are few references, however, to violence perpetrated on the other side of the border against Muslim women, which, as several commentators have pointed out, was as bad or worse. In the only token reference to violence against Muslim women, as Roop makes her way across the border in a car driven by Sardarji’s chauffeur in the long column of refugees, her children’s Bengali ayah Jorimon is nearly raped by a group of Muslim soldiers, even though she is clearly a Muslim. Roop shows the soldiers the tattoo that had been inscribed on her arm as a child in the Persian script and is thus able to save herself, while pretending to be an upper class Muslim. This incident is perhaps supposed to foreshadow the violence against Bengali women perpetrated by Pakistani soldiers during the 1971 events. ‘If men treat a woman they know to be of their quom in this cruel way, can any woman be safe?’

At the end, the capacity of Sikhs to endure suffering is reiterated. The spirit of Satya revisits the land where Sikh women continue

185 Ibid., pp. 422–29.
186 Ibid., pp. 520–24. Baldwin acknowledges Butalia’s work as a source for her depiction of partition violence. See Baldwin, What the Body Remembers, p. 540.
187 Satish Gujral has described the attack on the Muslim Girls’ Hostel at Amritsar, where the women were dragged out, stripped and forced to march in a procession to the main market, Hall Bazaar. They were gang-raped and subjected to the most perverse treatment imaginable before being murdered, as he witnessed on his own journey across the border. See Gujral, ‘Crossing the Jhelum’, p. 53.
188 Baldwin, What the Body Remembers, pp. 480–85.
189 Ibid., p. 482.
to suffer, even as a girl-child is born and she is reincarnated. ‘But men have not changed’. Here, metaphysical notions about reincarnation and an idealised image of Sikh women as perennial martyrs are arguably conflated in a facile way. In what purports to be the reassertion of the healing power of collective memory one may discern a banal form of ‘acting out’, in the form of a fantasy of redemption for Sikh womanhood. Meanwhile, Sardarji overcomes the trauma of the train journey with help from Roop, who finally shares with him her secret (a bad ear). Sardarji immerses himself in the task of building one of the ‘temples of modern India’, the Bhakra dam, showing true Punjabi resilience and enterprise as well as generosity, as he eventually allows the Pakistanis to copy the maps of the irrigation systems he had taken away with him in his flight. He thus redeems himself through an investment in modern development, literally as an engineer of Nehru’s India. This modern redemptive fantasy is not subjected to irony in conclusion.

A strong identitarian emphasis mars this fictional attempt to represent the ‘lost’ story of Sikh experiences of the partition,

\[190\] Ibid., p. 538.

\[191\] A discussion with Ananya Kabir helped clarify this point. Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* (1998) also foregrounds gender questions, and is set during the time of the partition. The novel highlights the perspective of the second generation who inherit scars from the past; the violence during the partition is the backdrop to the narration of the illicit relationship between the protagonist Virmati and the Professor. The absence of concrete details as regards partition events (mentioned in passing in excerpts from newspapers) makes this novel difficult to classify as a partition novel. Indeed the fact that Virmati escapes the dilemma of her situation as the Professor’s second wife due to the violence in Punjab and the resultant migration makes the partition itself seem like a plot twist.


\[193\] Ibid., pp. 503–6. Tan and Kudaisya provide a nuanced account of the transformation of agriculture in the eastern Punjab after 1947, with consolidation of land holdings, introduction of a system of ‘graded cuts’ to ensure a degree of social levelling and improvements in the irrigation system, resulting in the ‘green revolution’ and enhanced levels of prosperity in comparison to West Punjab. See Tan and Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition*, pp. 125–41.
even as a homogenous definition of the Sikh community is projected.\textsuperscript{194} This may stem to an extent from the need to retrieve lost community-based memories in diasporic communities which may at times lead to an erasure of shared memories of guilt and responsibility (exemplified in the best fiction by the Progressive writers).\textsuperscript{195} In contrast, an earlier Punjabi novel, Kartar Singh Duggal’s \textit{Nahun Tē Maas} (1951 trans. \textit{Twice Born Twice Dead} 1979) was scrupulous in avoidance of the rhetoric of blame and communal stereotyping.\textsuperscript{196} Duggal’s narrative captures with sensitivity aspects of the tragedy faced by the Sikh community during the worst atrocities during the migration across the border, witnessed by the author himself. The central characters are a minor Sikh landowner, Sohne Shah and his Muslim friend Chaudhri Allahditta’s daughter, Satbharai, whom he regards as fondly as his own daughter, who was killed during the violence. They are forced to flee Muslim rioters, who do not spare her father on account of his friendship with a Sikh. The tragic irony of the conclusion in which the young Sikh whom Satbharai falls in love with in the refugee camp is instrumental in sending her ‘back’ across the border after learning that she is a Muslim, may be contrasted with the ending of Baldwin’s narrative. In Duggal’s novel there is a refusal to

\textsuperscript{194} For a discussion of forms of identity politics amongst the South Asian diaspora, as well as resistance to such recent assertions, see P. Ghosh, \textit{Partition and the South Asian Diaspora}, pp. 175–229.

\textsuperscript{195} However, in contrast, an episode in Meera Syal’s \textit{Anita and Me}, in which memories of Partition violence are discussed (overheard by Meena, the child-protagonist, a second generation Punjabi migrant in the UK) emphasises the brutality on both sides as a shared recollection. See Syal, \textit{Anita and Me}, London: Flamingo, 1996, pp. 72–73. Kabir argues that this memory of a memory points to a dark hinterland to the comedic vision of Meena’s diasporic subjectivity, an instance of the workings of post-memory in Hirsch’s terms. See Kabir, ‘Gender, Memory’, pp. 181–82. Ismat Chughtai, for example, suggested that such claims that a particular community had suffered more than others could not be the basis for great literature, in an earlier cited essay on communal violence and literature. See Chughtai, ‘Communal Violence and Literature’, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{196} Kartar Singh Duggal (born 1917 in Dhaminal, Rawalpindi) is a prominent Punjabi writer who has published novels, short stories and plays. See biographical note in Cowasjee and Duggal eds. \textit{Orphans of the Storm}, p. 343.
label the self in crude identitarian terms and a revelation of the psychic costs of such drives to demarcate the ‘other’. This novel also offers an early criticism of the ironies of state sponsored rehabilitation procedures that eventually separate the adopted daughter from the father (a form of practical kinship, in Das’ terms) in the name of ‘national honour’.\footnote{See Das, \textit{Critical Events}, pp. 55–83.} The young Sikh relief worker succumbs in anguish to such arguments, as a result of the self-destructive denial of his incipient desire for Satbharai. Dehumanisation, Duggal’s narrative suggests, respects no borders.

Though contemporary attempts in fictional representation to recover community memory based on the recollections of family members may serve a limited purpose, claims to recovery of ‘voice’ may at times be somewhat deceptive, insofar as a new kind of re-representation is under way.\footnote{In contrast, for a convincing novelistic rendition of the experience of Pathan families who migrated to Bhopal in central India and stayed on after the partition, see Manzoor Ahtesham’s \textit{Sukha Bargad} (1983 trans. \textit{A Dying Banyan} 2005). This remarkable and self-critical Hindi novel, narrated from the point of view of a Muslim girl belonging to the second generation, at points takes on board bitter memories of the partition years, although the focus is on the lingering identity crisis for Indian Muslims that spills over into the post-Independence years.} Such narratives may lead instead to a reinforcement of boundaries between communities, each claiming to be the ‘real’ victim of the partition violence, claiming the role of perpetrator (as Butalia notes, such patterns of selective remembrance are rife in families affected by the partition, reinforcing extant stereotypes).\footnote{Butalia, ‘Communication’, p. 72.} This becomes even more invidious at a time when Right-wing identity politics is gaining strength and organised collection of survivor memories is being undertaken with deplorable political goals in mind.\footnote{As Tan and Kudaisya point out, Hindu cultural nationalists have sought to reinscribe the past with new meanings to energise their project of ‘making India Hindu’. See Tan and Kudaisya, \textit{The Aftermath of Partition}, p. 19.} Attempts to ‘fix’ memory are already under way across Punjab and elsewhere.\footnote{For an example in print form, see Vajpayee and Paradkar, \textit{Partition Days}.}

In a recent remarkably self-reflexive essay, Ritu Menon attempts to come to terms with the achievements and failures of the project.
to map the experiences of women during the partition violence through retrieval of memory and interviews with survivors.\footnote{202} Significantly, she recounts how in Pakistan resurgent identity politics led to the project remaining incomplete, as the team led by Nighat Said Khan was unable to proceed further given the dangers of contemporary identity assertions, especially amongst the Mohajirs.\footnote{203} Menon admits that given Right-wing efforts at reconstruction of the memory of partition in India today, her project too might be impossible.\footnote{204} Her essay demonstrates an awareness of the perils of relying too heavily on first person witness accounts, especially given the propensity of attempts to delve into the ‘mirror box’ of memory to be appropriated in the service of narrowly ideological ends. For the logic of a victim culture is often at the heart of processes driving towards consolidation of boundaries and ideas of retributive justice that propel later hostilities and acts of violence.\footnote{205} There is thus certainly a need for more careful appraisal of the at times inadvertently tragic outcome of attempts at retrieval of traumatic memory. What is crucial is the principle of selection at work, especially in recorded and reconstructed forms of retrieved memory that enter into the public domain.\footnote{206} The differences in register between the memories unearthed by oral historians and fictional representation is important, as we have seen, yet at times recent writing has blurred these boundaries in problematic ways, leading to the need for careful analysis of the

\footnote{202}{See Menon, ‘The Dynamics of Division’, pp. 115–30.}
\footnote{203}{For a later analysis of Pakistani women’s accounts of violence during the partition by a Pakistani scholar with a different emphasis, see Furrukh Khan, ‘Speaking Violence: Pakistani Women’s Narratives of Partition’ in Navnita Chadha Behera ed. Gender, Conflict and Migration, New Delhi: Sage, 2006, pp. 97–115. Khan is the director of a documentary film, ‘Stories of a Broken Self’ (2006), perhaps the first attempt to document the experiences of Pakistani women during the partition on film. Also see Menon, ‘The Dynamics of Division’, pp. 125–26.}
\footnote{204}{Menon, ‘The Dynamics of Division’, p. 126.}
\footnote{205}{As Goran Fejic shows, for instance, Croatian nationalism fed into warmongering against Bosnia, in a country that was itself the victim of Serb aggression. See Fejic, ‘On the Hague Conference, 1991’ in Deschaumes and Ivekovic eds. Divided Countries, p. 79.}
\footnote{206}{I am indebted for this idea to Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed.}
ideological drives often underpinning the imaginative recuperation of memory, especially in purportedly ‘historical’ novels.

Dreams or Nightmares: Mohajir Dilemmas and the Partition of Pakistan

Joginder Paul’s Urdu novel *Khwabrau* (1990 trans. *Sleepwalkers* 1998) touches upon the situation of Mohajirs who migrated to Karachi from Lucknow, and tried to retain the lifestyle of their ancestors, so much so that they created a mini-Lucknow in Karachi, even renaming street-names in the process. The eccentric protagonist, the ‘mad’ Deewane Maulvi Sahib, who believes that he is still in Lucknow and who is humoured in his mistaken assumption, is reminiscent of Manto’s Toba Tek Singh. His make-believe world is rudely shattered as the Mohajirs come under siege, even as sectarian/ethnic riots break out in Karachi. It is only now that Deewane Maulvi Sahib realises where he is and wishes to return to Lucknow. This, however, proves impossible, given the nature of boundaries established in postcolonial nation–states. The novel thus depicts the tragicomic results of an impossible nostalgia for a lost way of life, as well as the eventual shattering of the dream of retaining an originary identity. The mohajirs may seek to carry their

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**207** Born in 1925 in Sialkot in undivided Punjab, Joginder Paul migrated to India after the partition. He spent 14 years in Kenya before returning to India in 1964, where he has lived since. *Sleepwalkers* was first published as *Khwabrau* in Lahore in 1990. See biographical note in *Sleepwalkers*, trans. of *Khwabrau* by Sunil Trivedi and Sukrita Paul Kumar, 1990, New Delhi: Katha, 1998.

**208** As Tan and Kudaisya point out, Sindhi outrage at the separation of Karachi from Sindh when it was declared the national capital in 1948 embittered relationships between Sindhis and non-Sindhis. In the 1951 census, Mohajirs made up 55 per cent of the population of Karachi that had swelled from 435,000 in 1941 to 1.12 million. Mohajir influence began to decline in the 1950s after the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan. The erosion of the Muslim league as a party of the ‘old guard’ was symptomatic of these changes. The shift of the capital away from Karachi reflected these changes further, even as state patronage to the community dwindled. See Tan and Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition*, p. 184.
way of life with them and preserve its memory, but grim conflicts eventually penetrate into this hermetically sealed world, which cannot be maintained intact. The time of rupture is once again upon them, and they must renegotiate the terms of allegiance to the state and to the nation in the context in which they find themselves. The author’s ability to imagine with sensitivity this predicament of the Mohajir community makes this one of the novels that avoids the trap of an exclusive focus on identity/community based issues. Rather the absurd, yet poignant, situation of the main character enables us to empathise with, as well as engage in a critical way, with the situation of migrants/refugees who seek to cling to the memory of their cultural roots.

In a slightly different vein, Kamila Shamsie’s *Salt and Saffron* (2000) takes up the subject of divided Muslim families, dramatising the long-standing feud between two ashraf Muslim sisters on account of the decision of one of them to remain in India. The novel suggests that some writers in the third generation after the partition have achieved a different order of communication with those belonging to the first generation of migrants, after listening carefully and sharing their experiences. Shamsie depicts with sensitivity the conflict between the sisters, as well as the point of view of Aliya, the granddaughter of the Pakistani sister. To Aliya, this longstanding quarrel is somewhat incomprehensible, even as the Indian sister blames the Muslims who left India for the manifold problems faced by Indian Muslims. The present-day descendants

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209 Altaf Hussain founded the Mohajir (now Muttahida) Quami Mahaz with the demand that the Mohajir community be recognised as a fifth ‘nationality’ within Pakistan, after symbolically setting the Pakistani national flag on fire in 1979. The 1980s and 90s saw deadly sectarian/ethnic clashes break out in Karachi. See Tan and Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition*, pp. 185–86. This experience underlies Kamila Shamsie’s narration of life in the fear-ridden city of Karachi in *Kartography*, London: Bloomsbury, 2002 (see below).

210 Also see Bodh Prakash’s discussion of *Sleepwalkers* as a novel about the aftermath of the partition; he suggests that the novel’s ending indicates the inability of the Mohajirs and the Sindhis to achieve a creative interface, which remains a ‘dream’. See Prakash, ‘Nation and Identity’, pp. 80–84, especially p. 84.

in the family of Dard-e-dils can enter only up to a point into the memory of the two previous generations, however, and the novel’s focus is not so much on the historical experience of the partition but rather on the extent of divisions within Pakistani society, especially within the Mohajir community.

The motif of division is displaced in the novel on to the question of class and social location and its place in relationships, localised in a contemporary urban Karachi setting. A previous transgressive relationship between Aliya’s aunt Mariam Apa and the cook, whom she had eloped with and which had led to them being socially ostracised, parallels the contemporary love affair between the young protagonist Aliya and Khaleel, a handsome young man studying in America who does not quite fit into the strata of Pakistani society which her family belongs to. They are former zamindars from Uttar Pradesh who trace their lineage a long way back in time. The motif of overcoming inherited divisions from the past also has its resonance in terms of the rift in the extended family, which is transcended by the younger generation of Pakistanis and Indian Muslims to an extent.\textsuperscript{212} Shamsie explores the question of lingering guilt in Pakistan vis-à-vis the atrocities perpetrated during the independence struggle for Bangladesh in her recent novel, \textit{Kartography} (2002), again from the point of view of the younger generation living in the strife-ridden city of Karachi. The young stumble upon such repressed memories but have no choice but to contend with the legacy of violence witnessed and perpetrated by the previous generation. The appellation ‘Bingo’ used by the west Pakistanis to refer to the ‘inferior’ Bengalis is an illustration of the new kinds of ethnic stereotypes that arose and debasement of language after the formation of a nation–state with two separate

\textsuperscript{212} In \textit{Shadows of Time} (1987), an earlier novel by Pakistani writer Mehr Nigar Masroor, an idea that comes to the fore is that a cross-fertilisation of sorts had always taken place between the communities at the level of exchanges on the intellectual plane, sometimes on occasion even as a result of illicit liaisons, given the prohibitions on inter-marriage. The novel laments the absence of such exchanges in Pakistan. Masroor wrote this novel during the last year of her life while suffering from cancer. It was her desire that the novel be first published in India. See Farrukh Nigar Aziz, Foreword in Masroor, \textit{Shadows of Time}, Delhi: Chanakya, 1987.
wings, culminating in the second partition.\textsuperscript{213} There is an acknowledgement that if such disturbing memories are not faced up to, the likelihood of repetition and ‘acting out’ will remain.

Sorayya Khan’s \textit{Noor} (2003) tackles the enormity of atrocities during 1971 even more squarely. The idea of memory of trauma being transmitted across time and a generation, almost genetically, appears in this story of a former Pakistani soldier who adopts a young Bangladeshi orphan and brings her up in Pakistan. Her autistic daughter, born in Pakistan, begins to paint strangely vivid landscapes, which include representations of the violence in East Bengal, despite the fact that she had never been there. This eventually destabilises the pact with himself that the former soldier had made. Horror at what he and his compatriots had done floods back to destroy his peace of mind, leading him to commit suicide. Hirsch’s recognition of the subtle ways in which trauma may be transmitted to following generations, as illustrated in the notion of post-memory and her emphasis on the indirect and fragmentary nature of second generation memory is pertinent with respect to this narrative, as the images from the past resurface after a generation.\textsuperscript{214} This is borne out in the evocation of the child’s ability to uncannily bring forth on canvas images such as that of rivers turning red with the blood of corpses after the mass slaughter by the Pakistani army.\textsuperscript{215}


\textsuperscript{215} Though this novel is not directly about the partition, rather about its continuing after-effects a generation later, it is interesting to note that
In the novels written since 1980, issues pertaining to the persistence of the ‘time of partition’ came to the fore, as did the question of taking on board the residue of guilt, shame, repressed anger and trauma from the past to achieve a more complex working through of memories of violence and pain. Efforts at documentation of memory through witness accounts have added a new dimension to the historiography of the partition, as the emphasis on history from below led to the recovery of hitherto silenced stories. In the sphere of fictional representation, the use of such material has on occasion had problematic results, as narratives took a pronounced identitarian turn. The best recent writing demonstrates a movement beyond negative stereotyping, as well as an engagement with effects of historical trauma unaffected by the baggage of assumptions and taboos that nationalist myth making brought with it, or the need to exclusively assert the identity claims of a particular community. Such narratives may help resist the drive to homogeneity, as well as fine tune our sense of the necessary (but limited) role that personal and family histories might play in reshaping our sense of the often blurred border between past and present. This may enable us to more effectively come to terms with the pressing question posed by Deschaumes and Ivekovic, ‘How are representations of the past and the future to be decommunitarized?’ For while the basis for collective memory is indeed the community, there is a need for constant vigilance as communal/sectarian ideologies seek to co-opt memories of the past. As we have seen in this chapter, testimonial fictions that emphasise shared sites of struggle and that acknowledge the perils of exclusivist identity construction on the basis of memory may enable a more sharply critical understanding of collective and historical processes still underway that impinge on the recuperation of traumatic events such as the partition.

Sorayya Khan’s next novel, excerpted in a recent anthology, is set during the partition years and features a Hindu character who decides to stay on in Pakistan after 1947. See the excerpt from the novel Staying in M. Shamsie ed. And the World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women, New Delhi: Women Unlimited, pp. 61–71.

See Deschaumes and Ivekovic eds. ‘Preface’ in Divided Countries, p. ix.
Chapter 5

Short Stories about the Partition: Towards a Self-Reflexive Mode of Testimony

Alternative and atypical modes of literary witnessing and remembrance often appear in significant short stories about the partition, as we shall see in the discussion of this sub-genre of partition literature. Such ‘fictive’ testimony often stems from the desire to retrieve voices that for all practical purposes had been silenced, given the collective amnesia engendered by the discursive context of mainstream nationalist accounts, as shown earlier.1 Progressive writers such as Sajjad Zaheer, Rashid Jahan and Ismat Chughtai reinvented the Urdu afsana or short story form in the 1930s and 40s while negotiating the pressures of colonial modernity and processes of internal reform.2

1 See Pandey, Remembering Partition, pp. 152–74.
2 Also see Gopal’s discussion of the formation of the Progressive Writers Association, in particular with respect to the short story collection Angaarey, which created a furore in literary circles and orthodox Muslim society. See Gopal, Literary Radicalism, pp. 13–39. In Ahmed Ali’s description, the short story is a European genre that was taken over by Urdu in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Though there had been a long tradition of story telling, including the Dastans characterised by romance and adventure as well as more didactic tales, he dates the appearance of the modern short story in Urdu to the publication of Angaarey (1932). Ahmed Ali, ed. ‘Introduction’, Selected Urdu Short Stories from Pakistan, Islamabad: Pakistan Academy of Letters, 2000, pp. 1–4. Geeta Patel’s account of this episode, with a different emphasis, is useful as well. See G. Patel, Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings: On Gender, Colonialism and Desire in Miraji’s Urdu Poetry. New Delhi: Manohar, 2001 (rpt 2005), pp. 100–2. Also see Farooqi’s brief history of the Urdu afsana in Farooqi ed. The Oxford India Anthology of Modern Urdu Literature: Fiction, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. xxvii–xxxiii.
The ‘realist’ short story nonetheless continued to be informed by affective modes derived from earlier forms. Such innovations created the space for further, more radical reinventions of testimonial fiction in the wake of the catastrophe of partition. Aamir Mufti points out that the form of the short story took on an additional impetus and energy in the 1940s and 50s in the sphere of Urdu writing, especially in comparison to the novel. In Mufti’s terms the protocol of social (or socialist) realism, first formulated as a program of the Soviet Writers Congress in 1934 and adopted as official Popular Front policy in 1935, underwent a transformation while being transplanted to a colonial setting. Rather than a social realism, a ‘national’ realism articulated the relationship between writing and the nation. Mufti cites a passage from Mulk Raj Anand in which Anand argues that the goal of social realism becomes the narration of the passage from primitivism to modernity. For Mufti, the Urdu short story was far more ambivalent in its articulation of the dilemmas of the narrative of Indian selfhood during the passage from colonialism (rather than primitivism) to modernity. He invokes Georg Lukacs’ conception of the short story as ‘the narrative form which pinpoints the strangeness and ambiguity of life’, which ‘...sees absurdity in all its undisguised and unadorned nakedness, and the exorcising power of this view, without fear or hope, gives it the consecration of form’. For Mufti, the Urdu short story as a ‘minor epic form’ has this exorcising power, especially

3 In Mufti’s view such impetus as a ‘minor genre’ derived from the situation of Urdu writing as a minority literature located on the cusp between ‘minority’ and ‘nation’, which generated a ‘progressive’ aesthetics predicated on resistance to the categories of the nation–state. This aesthetic was shaped by the influence of Popular Front conceptions of art–work and society, and the need to tell the truth of society in fiction. Not simply a question of mimesis, this amounted to narrating the emergence of the consciousness of the secular nationalist citizen subject as ‘the highest form of consciousness possible in a colonial society’. See Mufti, ‘A Greater Story-Writer than God’, p. 11, also Enlightenment, pp. 180–85.


with respect to Urdu culture’s relationship with the nation. Manto’s ironic interrogation of the ambiguities of minority identity best illustrates this in Mufti’s account.

Important stories in Hindi, English and Punjabi, besides Urdu, interrogated the certitudes of nationalist self-formation, whether in the Progressive mode or otherwise, in the wake of partition. Short story writers in these languages too strove for such ‘exorcising power’, as a similar departure from ‘national realism’ was attempted in the wake of absurdities ushered in by the partition experience. For the influence of the Progressive aesthetic and the redefinition of this aesthetic was not confined to Urdu alone, even though experimentation may have been carried to the furthest in Urdu in the context of the dilemmas of minority experience. Indeed, the late 1940s and 50s saw an effervescence of writing across the spectrum in response to the unprecedented collective violence during 1947. In many short stories written in Hindi in the immediate aftermath the focus often seemed to be on capturing the extent of breakdown of norms and regression into depravity. Some of this writing was marred by the tendency to describe the horrors being witnessed

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6 See Mufti, ‘A Greater Story-Writer than God’, especially pp. 6–13, also Enlightenment, pp. 180–85. It may be argued that Mufti overstates the case for treating the Urdu short story as such a ‘minor genre’, especially given examples of writers less talented than Manto who often invested directly in nationalist affective economies. Mufti draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a ‘minor literature’ in this argument, exemplified by Kafka’s writings in their account, as a Czech writing in German. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature, trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986 (rpt 2000), pp. 16–27.

7 Mufti discusses Manto’s partition stories in a later, expanded version of his earlier essay; see Mufti, Enlightenment, pp. 201–7. However, Mufti does not address the limitations of attempts to negotiate partition violence by other Progressive writers. For a devastating indictment of writings on partition by the Progressive writers, particularly with respect to Urdu writing depicting communal riots, see Memon, ‘Partition Literature’, pp. 386–97. The question of finding an adequate mode of representing violence is addressed at greater length later in the chapter.

8 The PWA was a pan-Indian organisation with chapters in many states, beyond the north Indian context. See G. Patel, Lyrical Movements, p. 89.
in graphic detail. Such representations of horror and a veritable dance of death provide evidence of hitherto unimaginable manifestations of pathological behaviour at this time.

In significant writing, nonetheless, there was an impulse to bear critical witness not only to fiendish forms of violence, but also to the breakdown of communication and dialogue that took place during this time and the psychological and civilisational costs of this partitioning of consciousness. Important short stories written in the wake of the partition in both India and Pakistan, while taking on a testimonial function, began to further interrogate the extent to which such a function as surrogate testimony might be served. On occasion, the form could indicate less evident transformations in society and culture, including damage done to forms of civilisational memory. However, as Das and Nandy point out, many of the stories about the partition, often autobiographical in inspiration, reduced violence to the language of feud in which violence from one side was equally balanced with violence from the other. Violence perpetrated upon those travelling in a train to Lahore would thus be matched by descriptions of gruesome acts which travellers to Amritsar were subjected to.

The entry point into the discussion to follow of the effects of violence on the scaffolding of memory underpinning these short stories is primarily through the figure of the witness. This chapter

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10 Bhalla argues that the stories had more to do with the actuality of human experience in barbaric times than with ideologies and were bound together by a common thread. According to him, these stories find the notion that there was always hatred between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in ordinary life incomprehensible. See Introduction in Bhalla ed. Stories, p. xiv.
11 Kabir suggest that since the mode was less preoccupied with questions of cause and effect than the novel form, the short story could provide a pared down account of violence. Personal communication, Ananya Kabir.
12 See Das and Nandy, ‘Violence, Victimhood’, p. 189. Mufti alludes to Muhammad Hasan Askari’s earlier criticism of the unspoken convention in partition writings that ‘if at the beginning of the story five Hindus have been killed, then before the story is concluded five Muslims must also be accounted for’. Cited in Mufti, Enlightenment, pp. 206–7.
also takes up an early historical account of the partition, which provides an instance of biases prevalent in nationalist historiography that shaped collective negotiation of memory of the event. The stories are analysed in clusters, grouped in terms of the different conceptions of witnessing that appear. Talented practitioners of this form negotiated the traumatic memory of collective violence during the partition, generating distinctive modes of ‘fictive’ testimony. Indeed, the best short stories about the partition, I will argue, are examples of transformative testimony that continue to have resonance in contemporary South Asia. As we shall see, important short fiction as a mode of critical witness also indicated a self-reflexive awareness of the limits to ‘fictive’ testimony.

A Magistrate’s Account: Vicissitudes of Witnessing in the 1940s

The judicial notion of the testimony involves testifying in a court of law as the ‘third party’ in a dispute. As we have seen in the previous chapter, since 1990 accounts of the traumatic violence of 1947–48 based on interviews with survivor–witnesses became the basis for redefining our understanding of the partition and its legacy. Such witnesses have provided reluctant but critical evidence as regards the period, highlighting little-known facets of the partition experience, even if the crimes then committed rarely came

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13 In such testimony, as Harriet Davidson argues, the unspeakable is spoken in such a way that an affective dimension is added to speaking. An ethical and even political imperative towards understanding not just the past, but also the future, underlies such modes of witness. Indeed, the eyewitness or bystander may have been through an experience without the ability to witness it. Such acts of witnessing plunge into the domain of the inarticulate and create the possibility of a chain of witnesses, each of which receives a newly wrought history charged with the affect that compels its retelling. While aware of the destruction of physical being, such testimony also bears witness to the destructiveness of discursive contexts, especially on lives marked by extreme physical and psychic oppression, bringing an awareness of the future for the collective. There is thus a transformative dimension to testimony, in terms of its allowing for the opening of a space for social change. See Davidson, ‘Poetry, Witness, Feminism’, pp. 165–66.
up for trial. This inability to reckon with the traumatic aftermath of collective violence during the partition has had cultural as well as political consequences, as processes of reconciliation failed to gather adequate momentum. Beyond issues relating to punitive justice, societal questions of owning up to wrongs perpetrated by different communities and the need for a collective assumption of responsibility for grievous breach of ethical compacts are being addressed. Within India the emergence of a culture of impunity and complicity with respect to later instances of collective violence such as the anti-Sikh pogrom in Delhi in 1984, the 1992–93 Bombay riots after the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2002 in India may to an extent be the legacy of this failure to address the outcome of violence during 1947.\footnote{A discussion with Deepak Mehta helped clarify this idea.}

A similar situation can be discerned with respect to the experience of Karachi in particular, as well as other parts of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The origins of contemporary misrecognition of the effects of the historical trauma of the partition, as we have seen, can at least in part be traced back to nationalist and statist discourses that appeared in the first decade after independence. As a further example, G. D. Khosla’s \textit{Stern Reckoning} (1949) attempts to collate and analyse the testimony of witness–survivors. This study is the result of the work of a Fact Finding Organisation set up by the Government of India, led by Khosla, a Justice of the Punjab High Court. The Fact Finding Organisation interviewed more than 15,000 survivors of the violence that took place in different villages and areas; only approximations of numbers of lives lost in North-west India were possible, as Khosla points out. He speaks of 250,000 non-Muslims and an equal number of Muslims killed, probably an underestimation of the actual number, especially Muslims, as later historians have shown.\footnote{Pandey, \textit{Remembering Partition}, pp. 88–91.} Furthermore, his estimate of the property loss to non-Muslims is 20,000 million rupees, but he does not provide an estimate of property lost by Muslims.

Khosla’s report says that

The great upheaval which shook India from one end to the other during a period of about 15 months commencing with August 16, 1946, was
an event of unprecedented magnitude and horror. History has not known a fratricidal war of such dimensions in which human hatred and bestial passions were degraded to the levels witnessed during this dark epoch when religious frenzy, taking the shape of a hideous monster, stalked through cities, towns and countryside, taking a toll of half a million innocent lives... Madness swept over the entire land, in an ever increasing crescendo, the reason and sanity left the minds of rational men and women, and sorrow, misery, hatred, despair took possession of their souls...

The trope of madness recurred in numerous accounts of the violence of 1946–47, and was used by political leaders as well as journalists as a way of explaining what had happened. At one point during his stay in the ‘Hydari Mansion’ in Beliaghat in the worst affected areas of Calcutta during the 1947 violence, Gandhi told demonstrators ‘But let me tell you that if you again go mad, I will not be a living witness to it. I have given the same ultimatum to the Muslims of Noakhali also: I have earned the right. Before there is another outbreak of Muslim madness in Noakhali, they will find me dead’.

Traces of the rhetoric of blame can be discerned in Khosla’s discussion of the events of 1946–47 and the growing influence of the Muslim League and Jinnah, which culminates in a final assignment of blame in the concluding chapter. He provides a detailed description of the bloody massacres that took place in the various states in the north-western part of India while taking up the violence in the various districts in the Punjab, in Sindh and in the north-west frontier province. However, Khosla refers to the violence in East Punjab against Muslims as ‘Retaliation’ and certainly does not achieve the same kind of level of detailed analysis, perhaps also because there were few survivors on this side of the border who could provide such testimony. This elision of the suffering of the Muslim community and exclusion of those deemed not to belong

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17 I am indebted for this idea to Ravikant.
20 Ibid., pp. 89–273.
21 Ibid., pp. 277–91.
is significant, insofar as it implicitly constitutes a place of absence from which the witness might have spoken.

This was a heavy price and the memory of this painful and costly transaction will linger for years and continue to embitter and enrage the refugees. Perhaps there are some who will take warning from the sad chapter in our history and endeavour to guard against a repetition of these events. So long as sectarianism and narrow provincialism are allowed to poison the minds of the people, so long as there are ambitious men with corruption inside them, seeking power in position, so long will the people continue to be deluded and misled, as the Muslim masses were deluded and misled by the League leaders and so long will discord and disruption continue to threaten our peace and integrity.

Khosla seems keen to place the historical experience of the partition within a particular nationalist framework, at times coming close to identifying the Indian state with non-Muslim concerns (as if there were no corrupt and ambitious leaders in other communities). Furthermore, the suffering of individual witnesses is not the priority in his narrative with its emphasis on enumeration and statistics, whether that of people killed or properties lost. Few prosecutions or trials of those responsible for atrocities took place on either side of the border. The possibility of some kind of moral resolution at the collective level was thus forestalled. Instead, an unspoken consensus about the need for silence about such ‘sensitive’ issues during the phase of nation building ensued. Such oral evidence was necessary to the administrative structure for the purposes of relief and rehabilitation; from then on the evidence of the witnesses was seemingly deemed superfluous. Indeed, the interviews conducted by the Fact Finding Organisation remain confidential till this day.

This silenced testimonial record constitutes a spectral archive, I contend, which continues to haunt the collective imagination across the subcontinent.

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22 Ibid., p. 299.
23 Gyanendra Pandey, personal communication.
24 It is true that some memoirs about the event did appear, as cited earlier, even though these did not receive adequate public attention till much later. See the excerpts from Begum Anis Kidwai’s memoir, as well as other memoirs in Hasan’s earlier cited anthology, especially pp. 158–72, as well as analyses of memoirs of life in Delhi by Pandey in Remembering
The Fallibility of Literary Witnessing

In the short stories produced in the wake of the partition, in contrast, the figure of the witness was in many respects pivotal. Intizar Husain’s story ‘An Unwritten Epic’ (trans. M. U. Memon) explicitly thematises the difficulty of bearing witness to the event.25 The story has a self-reflexive, dialogic form; the narrator is a writer who seeks to understand the momentous changes afoot that eventually cause him to migrate from the town of Qadirpur in Uttar Pradesh to Pakistan. He becomes witness to the fate of the protagonist, Pichwa, a local strongman. Husain vividly describes political activism at the local level leading up to the partition, as well as the confusion that resulted when goals sought for did not quite materialise. The clashes and everyday disputes between groups of wrestlers and strongmen in the township form the backdrop to later events that take violence to a further level of intensity. Pichwa has a strong sense of territoriality and defends his village against marauders from other towns in the vicinity. However, he is unable to understand how it is that Qadirpur did not belong to Pakistan after its formation. Pichwa’s ambition of raising the Pakistani flag in Qadirpur remains unrealised.

Pichwa eventually leaves for Pakistan along with other Muslim refugees, although he holds out against the idea of migration for a considerable length of time. The last section of the story is narrated in the form of diary entries. The narrator acknowledges that the character Pichwa could not be contained in the form of the short story and that only the form of the novel could do justice to his character. Given that no epic poetry had been written on the partition riots, he thinks of the possibility of writing a prose epic with Pichwa as protagonist; a jumhurnama, or chronicle of the artition, pp. 125–34. Also see Kamla Patel’s memoir Torn from the Roots. Such narratives too preserved the memory of the event in the absence of systematic memorialisation, though sometimes in problematic ways centred on personal or family experience.

25 Intizar Husain (1925) was born in Dibai near Bulandshahr in Uttar Pradesh and migrated to Lahore in Pakistan in 1947. Creative writer, critic and translator, he has published short fiction, a novella and novels in Urdu. See biographical note in Memon ed. An Epic Unwritten, p. 364.
common folk, rather than a shahnama, or chronicle of the kings. As the narrator notes, after Pichwa reaches Pakistan he is unable to find work. Indeed, he is startled to find major disparities in terms of the distribution of land in Pakistan, naively believing that the Muslim zamindars in Pakistan would give him a portion of land as a fellow Muslim refugee.

The irony is heightened as Husain’s narrator wonders about the prospects for ‘constructive’ literature, as advocated by those who believe in literature’s role in the process of ‘nation-building’. The narrator contemplates writing a Mahabharata about Qadirpur, with Pichwa as protagonist, a modern Arjuna. Eventually, as limits on further migration are imposed by the Pakistani government and some are ordered to return to India, Pichwa departs for Qadirpur. A letter from India reaches Pakistan soon after, informing the narrator that Pichwa had been hanged after getting into conflict with the local jats, who had renamed the town Jatunagar. This causes the narrator to defer his idea of writing a novel. Indeed, he gives up the project of writing altogether, as he decides to take the more pragmatic route after a flourmill is allotted to him. He closes the diary that had been the basis of his narrative with the thought that this is something that one does only when unemployed; an ironic comment on the nationalist, ideological and existential pressures that may bear down on the activity of writing. The story thus effectively dramatises the failure of existing narrative forms, including ‘national realism’, to encapsulate the extent of loss. There is a self-conscious reflection regarding the possibility that such modes of narrativising character and event inherited from the past may have been fractured beyond repair by the colossal rupture and fallout of

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26 Zamindar shows that the Pakistan government regarded the exodus of refugees from India with some apprehension. After the agreed ‘transfer of populations’ in the Punjab, the Punjab Boundary Force had been set up, which was unable to stem the violence. This was eventually replaced by the joint Military Evacuation Organisation. While the Pakistan government accepted the total evacuation of Muslims in the Punjab, the policy of deterring migrations from elsewhere was adopted due to fear of being overrun by migrants who could not be accommodated, despite the earlier notion of Pakistan as a haven for sub-continental Muslims. See Zamindar, The Long Partition, pp. 39–44.
1947. The reflexive take on the limits to the short story’s testimonial function allows us to grasp the ambivalent situation of characters like Pichwa, caught up in the vortex of historical processes beyond their comprehension. Instead, the unwritten epic lingers in the memory of the narrator, an instance of the gap between facts and representations opened up by the partition to which he becomes an unwilling witness.

Nostalgia seems to have become an impossible luxury amidst the ruins of the past, even as the imperative to preserve memories of a lost way of life remains. A kind of double-seeing in which both the past and present become simultaneously visible characterises the narrative. Husain’s sharp sense of disillusionment with failed political ideals in the present comes to the fore as he bears witness to the predicament of those who became unwitting casualties due to their incomprehension of irrevocable changes that had come about with the partition. A certain degree of nostalgia may be an inevitable accompaniment of the experience of migration. For Husain, who migrated from Uttar Pradesh to Pakistan after the partition, critical nostalgia enables an imaginative exploration of the moment of rupture and its cultural consequences up to the present. Indeed, he sees this as the major difference between his own work on the partition, often suffused with nostalgia for the Indo-Islamic

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27 In contrast, the character Fazlu in Progressive Urdu writer Khadija Mastur’s ‘The Miscreant’ (trans. Tahira Naqvi) is manipulated too easily by vested interests to rape and kill Hindus in revenge for the alleged murder of his sister by Hindus whom he had sworn to protect. See Khadija Mastur, ‘The Miscreant’, trans. Tahira Naqvi in M. U. Memon ed. Cool, Sweet Water: Selected Stories, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999, pp. 7–23. Also see Chandra’s reading of ‘An Unwritten Epic’, in which he highlights the grandeur and absurdity of Pichwa, an exceptional figure in his ‘linear movement from enchantment to disenchantment’. See Sudhir Chandra, ‘Partition as Hijrat and as Slave Trade: Reading Intizar Husain’s “An Unwritten Epic”’ in Jasbir Jain ed. Reading Partition/Living Partition, New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2007, p. 83. In the light of Zamindar’s above cited argument about the predicament of many late migrants from regions other than the Punjab after the Pakistani state began to discourage further migration as official policy, we may disagree with this characterisation of the exceptional nature of Pichwa’s situation.
cultural amalgam that had evolved over centuries, and the stories of Manto. Such critical nostalgia takes on the burden of recuperating memories of this cultural amalgam, even while acknowledging the extent of the rupture caused by the partition. Manto’s bleak ironies seem to interrogate, in contrast, any optimism as regards the survival of a shared culture in the aftermath of collective violence. As we have seen above, Husain is also aware of the susceptibility of literary forms to being appropriated in the service of narrowly defined agendas. Such pressures may in fact curtail the possibility of recuperating alternative histories and forms of civilisational memory that continue to be erased, even as configurations of the nation based on hatred of the ‘other’ continue to hold sway.

Sa’adat Hasan Manto wrote some of his finest stories in Urdu about the partition in the years before his death in 1955. Manto’s first response came in the form of abbreviated and atypical forms of testimonial fiction, narrated as if by a witness not quite able to come to terms with the enormity of what was transpiring before him. Shock, numbness and subsequent disorientation undergone by many who witnessed the collective violence during the partition

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28 Personal communication, Intizar Husain. As Memon points out, this nostalgia is tempered by a degree of realism and an acceptance of the reality of Pakistan. For Memon, Husain’s anguish arises from the painful realisation that the course of history confronted him with a choice between being Indian and being Muslim, and thus rent the delicate fabric of simultaneous loyalty to both. See Memon, Introduction to Basti, p. 398.

29 Husain says that he is primarily a writer of stories; he refutes the proposition that there must be do’s and dont’s for creative writers, repudiating any form of dogmatism (this being a legacy of one phase of the Progressive Writers movement). Personal communication, Intizar Husain. According to Flemming, from 1938 onwards the leaders of the Progressive movement began increasingly to enforce the model of socialist realism derived from Russian communist literature. See Leslie Flemming, Another Lonely Voice: The Life and Works of Sa’adat Hasan Manto, Lahore: Vanguard, 1985, p. 26.

30 Sa’adat Hasan Manto, Urdu short story writer and playwright, was born in Sambrala in Punjab, in 1912. After years spent in Amritsar, Aligarh (for his education, which remained incomplete) and Delhi, while working for All India Radio, he migrated from Bombay (where he was a script writer in the film industry) on account of rising communal tensions to
and the resultant sense of bewilderment come through powerfully in *Siyah Hashye*, or *Black Margins* (trans. M. Hasan). These vignettes read at times like reportage, although it is as if Manto is able to beat journalistic reportage at its own game in its quest for horrific and grisly detail. The parallel between witness accounts, reportage and these sketches breaks down, however, as Manto imaginatively distances the experience of witnessing the descent into depravity through the use of black humour and the grotesque. These anecdotal writings sharply question the instrumental rationality that underpinned planned acts of communal violence. In Manto’s short fiction we find a fragmentary, ironic response to the moral catastrophe of the partition and atypical forms of witnessing that also may indicate his awareness at an early stage of the limits to ‘fictive’ testimony.

The shock of such brief sketches such as ‘Wages Of Labour’ (trans. M. Hasan) lies in the dislocation of our sense of the ordinary as the monstrous seems to become commonplace in the new scheme of things, while everyday moralising is rendered superfluous. ‘Looting and plundering were rampant. More so following the inflamed communal passions’. Following communal riots, looters move about gleefully with their stolen goods, accepting anarchy and chaos as a matter of course, actions described by the narrator–witness with a nonchalant air. At the end of the story a Kashmiri labourer with a stolen bag of sugar is caught by the police who refuse to allow him to proceed with his loot; he then asks to be at least given the wages of his ‘labour’. The ironic conclusion indicates an evacuation of the ethical assumption that means remain commensurate with ends.

Pakistan in January 1948. He was prosecuted for obscenity several times in his lifetime, but the cases were eventually dismissed. The stories about the partition were written in the years before his early death in Lahore in 1955. See biographical note in M. Hasan ed. *India Partitioned*, vol. 1, pp. 88–89.


33 The different situation of the Holocaust generated similar dark ironies. Dan Diner gives us an account of the direction of the reversal of values,
The ending also indicates Manto’s sharp awareness that the failure to achieve social justice in the form of a redistribution of resources could all too easily be swept under the carpet even as celebrations of Independence began.

We may turn to other examples of Manto’s initial response to the partition. Take ‘Miracles’ (trans. M. Hasan), in which the police conduct raids to recover stolen goods and people seek to get rid of these goods under the cover of darkness to avoid them. A man dumps the bag of sugar he had looted in a nearby well, into which he falls in the process of doing so. People hear the noise of his accident and drag him out, but he dies a few hours later. The next day water drawn from the well tastes sweet; candles are lit at the man’s grave that night. The devastating impact of this conclusion stems from the ironic disclosure of the facile acceptability of perpetrators bringing such collective ‘good fortune’ to the community, though only in the limited sense of making the water in the well sweet. The candles lit remind us of customary rituals usually performed in the memory of the heroic dead.

The partition, Manto hints, distorted conceptions of the heroic and led to such kinds of grotesque ritual becoming commonplace, as even thieves and murderers might be commemorated as contributors to ‘community’ welfare. It is significant to note that he does not identify the religious community of the man who dumps the sugar in the well. The monstrous and the commonplace seem almost indistinguishable in the new state of affairs in this account, making it more difficult to distance these events by placing them in the category of a rare, once in a lifetime aberration, or an episode of ‘religious frenzy’. The conclusion reinforces the shock to middle class readers expecting a moral statement condemning the prevalent condition of anomie. Similarly, in ‘An Enterprise’ (trans. M. Hasan), one of Manto’s brief anecdotes, arsonists gut an entire market except one shop, which escapes the flames. The hoarding engendered by the Nazis, by the Jewish councils against themselves and their community in the ghettos in Poland in the absence of alternatives. In the ghettos, the value-ethics of means and ends and the assumptions of rationality underlying this were subverted in the name of temporary survival. See Dan Diner, ‘Historical Understanding and Counterrationality: The Judenrat as Epistemological Vantage’ in Friedlander ed. Probing the Limits of Representation, p. 140.
on this shop reads ‘A complete range of building and construction materials sold here’.\textsuperscript{34} Here the motivation to profit from a situation of crisis becomes a new rationale for action, no longer submerged beneath layers of hypocritical morality.

In his later short stories about the partition the use of paradox and the ironical denouement, techniques already honed by Manto in his pre-partition stories, are further refined with reference to events that seem to beggar belief, yet necessitate the reinvention of modes of testimony. In Manto’s masterpiece, ‘Toba Tek Singh’, (trans. M. Asaduddin) written after his own experience of being treated for alcoholism in an asylum, the commonplace explanation offered by Khosla regarding collective madness afflicting the populace during the partition is satirically interrogated. Manto begins with an allusion to the exchange of populations, though he does not refer directly to the large-scale cataclysmic violence that took place at the time. The story’s locale is the madhouse that houses Bishan Singh, a Sikh known as Toba Tek Singh (the village to which he belongs). He desperately seeks to ascertain where his village will be located after the partition. In the process Toba Tek Singh becomes a site, both topographical and psychological, through which the dilemmas of bearing witness are explored.

Manto here sharply satirises the jingoism and demagoguery that was part of the negotiations towards the transfer of power. The exchange of lunatics itself is represented as an act of colossal absurdity. The kind of calculus deployed in the decision-making process excludes all Hindus and Sikh madmen living in Punjab from the possibility of being able to stay on in western Punjab, although some Muslims resident in India who have relatives there stay on in the asylums in that part of the Subcontinent. The asymmetrical exchange of madmen parallels the asymmetrical exchange of populations after the worst phase of violence (few Hindus and Sikhs remained in Pakistan, while a considerable number of Muslims remained in India). Manto examines with irony the bureaucratic logic that sought to deal with the situation obtaining on partition of the subcontinent with an approximation of normality. There is a sharp criticism here of instrumental rationality and the scissors

and paste logic at work during the Radcliffe Commission’s deliberations. For the inhabitants of the madhouse seem to possess in their own way a sense of the significance of the event and the extent of damage done.\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, the increasing levels of incoherence visible in discourses of high politics as well as in the public domain are discernible in the collective bewilderment and anguish of the madmen.

Manto shows the logic of fragmentation that led up to the partition to be based on false premises, affecting even madmen, who begin to espouse exclusivist concepts of religion and religious identity. Further, the tendency to compartmentalise individuals solely on the basis of their religious affiliation is trenchantly satirised. This becomes evident when Bishan Singh, in his quest for evidence asks for the opinion of a madman who had declared himself to be God as to where his village is finally to be located, and receives the lofty answer that the decision was yet to be taken. The madmen who declare that they are respectively Master Tara Singh and Jinnah and nearly begin a riot in the process are further examples of derangement in the realm of high politics, mirrored in the microcosm of the madhouse. The gibberish that Bishan Singh utters becomes a vehicle for initially articulating his sense of bewilderment and later his growing anger. Finally, this ‘nonsense’ allows for the articulation of a stance against the collective irrationality exemplified by the moment of the partition, especially in the use of the closing Punjabi phrase ‘dur fitey munh’ (69) (literally, ‘may you blacken your faces’, or ‘shame on you’).\textsuperscript{36}

Toba Tek Singh’s death in no man’s land signifies the closure of possibilities for the man whose fragile hold on reality is contingent upon a sense of place and an enduring bond with his land and village of origin. Toba Tek Singh collapses after standing through the

\textsuperscript{35} Also see Introduction in Ravikant and Saint eds. \textit{Translating Partition}, especially p. xvi.

night in no man’s land between fences of barbed wire, uttering a
cry at the end that pierces the sky. The story’s allegorical structure
becomes clear as Manto’s description identifies the protagonist
and the allegorical structure becomes clear as Manto’s descrip-
tion identifies Toba Tek Singh and the village he came from.\textsuperscript{37}
The matter-of-factness of the narration of his death heightens the
poignancy of the situation, given our awareness of his vulnerability.
Toba Tek Singh emerges as a witness to a residual structure of
feeling, embodying an organic attachment to land and roots. His
‘mad’ \textit{satyagraha} and negation of the inevitability of the partition
stands in sharp contradistinction to the facile invocation of collective
in-sanity to explain away the violence in early accounts such as that
of Khosla and other historians.

Manto searches deeper into the fractured polity, exploring
the obscure motivations and pathological impulses that ideology
could mask over in his story ‘Open It!’ (trans. M. Asaduddin). The
\textit{razakars} who assist Sirajuddin, the beleaguered father of Sakina, the
protagonist, are typical volunteers, or so it seems. The concept of
voluntary activism was integral to nationalist mobilisation, during
which various groups initiated community service. Manto’s story,
however, is concerned with the debasement of such social work.
The \textit{razakars} betray the cause they represent and rather than acting
according to humanitarian motives to help locate the missing girl,
themselves violate her and leave her to be discovered by her dis-
traught father. Such perversion of altruism is even more horrify-
ing than the absence of altruism, for it suggests a form of hypocrisy
that if widely prevalent, might make it impossible for society to
continue to function. At the end of the story the doctor and father
become witnesses to Sakina’s traumatised response to the doctor’s
request to open the window, ‘\textit{khol do}’ or ‘open it’. For Sirajuddin
her action of untying her salwar is a sign of life to be welcomed.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37} Arjun Mahey characterises the story as a modern fable, rather than
as an allegory, as Flemming does. See Mahey, ‘Partition Narratives: Some

\textsuperscript{38} As Veena Das points out, Sakina in ‘Open It!’ proclaims the terrible
truth of this society through mute repetition, following which it becomes
the task of the father to bear witness through the hearing of silence moulded
by his presence. See Das, ‘Language and Body’, p. 87.
The doctor, meanwhile, perceives the extent of the horrific violence Sakina has been subjected to and breaks into a cold sweat.

Manto situates the story in Lahore in the newly born state of Pakistan. Although the story addresses the trauma of a victim subjected to repeated rape, Manto does not dwell on this experience. Rather, the witness trauma experienced by the doctor mediates the more extreme situation of psychological numbing undergone by Sakina. The doctor’s response at the level of sensory perception is a form of embodied witnessing, as the imprint of secondary trauma remains with the doctor. Sirajuddin’s joy at his daughter’s survival is of course premised on misrecognition of her situation, and a failure to understand what she has been through. There is also a questioning of the implicit equation of the enemy with the ‘other’ community; the violators unexpectedly turn out to be the razakars, belonging to the same community. The story reserves its revelation of the betrayal of voluntarist ideals to the very end.

In the story ‘Cold Meat’ (trans. M. Asaduddin) Manto represents the impact of a near-necrophiliac experience on the psyche of Ishar Singh, a Sikh who participates actively in loot and rape. His state of impotence after inadvertently raping a dead Muslim woman is inexplicable to him and to his wife Kulwant Kaur. We get a sense here of Manto’s ability to get to the root of pathological forms of desire, rather than simply representing the symptoms. Through the self-witnessing and confessional disclosures of Ishar Singh the story portrays the psychological costs of a descent into a living nightmare. The consequences of the inability or refusal to recognise the ‘other’ are at the heart of the story’s criticism of

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39 Even so, this response may be contrasted with the attitudes of many fathers who rejected ‘dishonoured’ daughters due to societal stigma as regards recovered women. See Das, *Critical Events*, pp. 55–83.

40 For Mufti, the story thus undermines the complicity between the two nation–states that emerged out of the partition, the strategy of normalisation through which mutual definition was achieved by taking possession of women. See Mufti, *Enlightenment*, p. 205.

41 Manto’s later defence of this story when charged with obscenity rested upon the assertion that even such a man as Ishar Singh had an iota of humanity left in him, leading his body to negate its own desires. As Manto argued in his testimony, only a sick person could derive a pornographic thrill from a story that leaves a ‘normal’ person cold rather than excites.
sexual violence and sadism. This is exemplified in the Sikh’s admission of horror at realising that he had raped a dead Muslim girl. His subsequent inability to ‘perform’ is the fallout of lack of mutual recognition in the previous rapes committed by him. Ishar Singh suffers a kind of excruciating symbolic death as he is beset by this horrific memory, before being stabbed in the throat by Kulwant Kaur in the somewhat macabre conclusion. Such self-incriminating testimony to the effects of a kind of near-necrophiliac excess and inadvertent indulgence in pathological forms of self-gratification becomes unbearable to her. Effectively, the possibility of self-witness in the confessional mode is throttled here through her savage act of censorship of memory (her action is not only on account of ‘jealousy’ or fury at his betrayal). Unlike the different witness figures previously discussed, Kulwant is a representation of a type, an earthy Sikh wife unable to come to terms with the evidence of the descent into the abyss of her partner and his subsequent attempt at self-disclosure.

The atypical witness figures in Manto thus allow glimpses into the nature of extreme situations to which different responses might be possible, whether embodied witnessing in the face of unspeakable violence, perverse rationalisation in the case of the unreliable witness, savage (self)-censorship or an ironic, fragmentary mode of witnessing that allows recognition of fallibility. As Primo Levi and Agamben have shown with respect to Auschwitz, the notion of the ‘true’ or ‘complete witness’ is an impossibility, since the dead who have seen it all cannot speak. Furthermore, at points there may have been an exchange of roles between oppressor and victim, the ‘grey zone’ inhabited by the privileged and collaborators. The lacuna in testimony that calls into question the identity and reliability of the witness is acknowledged by Levi, who speaks of his discourse

For an extended discussion that also takes on board the response of the Progressives to the story, focusing primarily on the politics of masculinity, see P. Gopal, ‘Bodies Inflicting Pain: Masculinity, Morality and Cultural Identity in Manto’s “Cold Meat”’ in Kaul ed. The Partitions of Memory, especially pp. 261–62.

Ibid., p. 261.

Gopal notes that Manto’s work is occasionally uneven and can be simplistic. Ibid., pp. 244–45.
as being on behalf of third parties, the mute, and the ‘drowned’. What remains according to him is the choice of becoming a proxy witness, the attempt to retrospectively articulate a different kind of testimony at the very edge of language’s expressive possibilities. Speaking on behalf of those who cannot bear witness themselves also entails a certain responsibility and the need to look within, acknowledging that the best may have perished, while only the worst survived. Manto’s fiction, at its best, enables such a reflexive recognition of the difficulty of bearing critical witness, and the near-impossibility of eliciting testimony in complete form. Rather, atypical forms of testimonial fiction here become a fragile mode of witnessing the witnesses.

**Stigma and Storytelling:**

**The Figure of the Abducted Woman**

As we have seen in Chapter Four, the recovery of hitherto silenced stories of abducted women has been crucial to recent feminist interventions regarding the partition. From an anthropologist’s perspective, Veena Das has analysed notions of ‘honour’ and ‘purity’ that underlay state sponsored recovery efforts and that led to stigmatisation of recovered women. As argued earlier, modes of embodied witnessing existed in disparate social spaces as the ‘poisonous knowledge’ of historical trauma was transmitted, sometimes in muted form, in the interstices of societal structures. As evidence of this we may note the centrality of the figure of the abducted woman to many significant short stories about the partition. Amrita Pritam’s long short story or novella ‘Pinjar’ (trans. K. Singh, ‘The Skeleton’) depicts the experiences of the protagonist, Peero, a Hindu woman, abducted by Rashida (who belongs to the Muslim shaikh community) in the 1930s. This act is in part reprisal for

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45 Das, *Critical Events*, p. 78.
46 See Das, ‘Language and Body’, pp. 82–89. A revised version of this essay appears in Das’ *Life and Words*, pp. 38–58.
47 Amrita Pritam (1919–2005), Punjabi poet and fiction writer, was known as a crusader for humanism, which she regarded as the basis for
the earlier abduction of Rashid’s aunt by Hindu sahukars from her own family. Peero is forced to marry Rashida after her family refuse to take her back when she tries to escape. The nature of the stigma now attached to her person becomes visible to her, causing her to feel revulsion towards her own body. After bearing his child, whom she is initially repelled by, Peero becomes a witness to subsequent abductions during the partition, including that of her brother’s wife. With Rashida’s help she is able to intervene and restore her sister-in-law to her family. The victim becomes a witness–actor here, even as Peero notes with bitter irony the changes in attitudes in society towards such women at a time when abductions had become widespread.

Rashida is gradually transformed from abductor into caring husband. He even accepts in his family the child of a mad-woman whom Peero seeks to adopt, and defends her right to do so when the Hindu community attempt to claim the child as their own. Rashida’s tortured conscience leads him to take Peero to meet her brother at the border after the family in India is informed of the recovery of her sister-in-law. Eventually, she decides to stay in Pakistan with her children and Rashida. Peero bids her brother to treat his wife well, as part of Peero was returning with her. Even amidst widespread brutalisation and inhumanity, she retains the ability to make choices, especially in relation to her decision to live and subsequently stay on with Rashida. She is able to recover a degree of equilibrium through her own acts of intervention and embodied witnessing.

Amrita Pritam here traces the prehistory to the widespread abductions during the partition, acknowledging the long-standing feuds and mutual distrust within village society. ‘Pinjar’ sharply critiques of the double standards at work in a society in which notions of stigma and pollution by touch led to the marginalisation of such abducted women even if recovered. There is a gradual change in the personality of an abductor like Rashida. After being driven

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communal relations, for her romantic poetry, as well as for poems expressing revolutionary ideas, written after her association with the Progressive Writers movement. Her poem ‘Aj Akhan Waris Shah Nun’ (trans. ‘I Say Unto Waris Shah’) was written just after the worst of rioting in Punjab after the partition. See biographical note in M. Hasan ed. India Partitioned, vol. 2, p. 287.
by prevalent codes of masculinity and the family feud to force himself on Peero, he experiences the force of her bodily revulsion for him and seeks to make amends for his behaviour during the later violence. This lends depth to the storyline and ensures that the simplistic victim-orientation earlier discerned in *What the Body Remembers* is avoided. The tracing of changes in attitudes towards such women across a generation allows for a nuanced treatment in historical terms of the predicament of such survivors. It is when helping later victims of abduction that Peero is able to negotiate the residue of unclaimed experience as a result of her own traumatic abduction earlier. Through the double-telling of the story of the symbolic death to her community for Peero, as well as the unbearable story of her survival as a living skeleton and subsequent witnessing of widespread repetition of abduction, ‘Pinjar’ achieves the task of bearing witness to the unspeakable.48

Other important stories depicting the figure of the abducted woman include Rajinder Singh Bedi’s ‘Lajwanti’ (trans. author), Jamila Hashmi’s ‘Banished’ (trans. M. U. Memon) and Ashfaque Ahmad’s ‘Stony Hearted’ (trans. M. Asaddudin).49 Bedi’s story effectively demystifies the often perverse idealism prevalent in the Punjabi Hindu community in the years following the propagation of the shuddhi moment by the Arya Samaj, in the phase when the recovery process had begun. Sunder Lal, the husband of the protagonist Lajwanti and an activist dedicated to the idea of accepting abducted women after their recovery, places his wife on a pedestal as a *devi*, a goddess, when she returns during one such exchange

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48 See Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, pp. 7–8. Also see Nandrajog’s discussion of other Punjabi stories that ‘edit’ memories of partition violence. Her essay takes up the important question of the denial of the memory of culpability in the Sikh community, as well as the few stories that do engage critically with the memories of violence by Sikhs, including against women within the community. Such stories (including Gurdev Singh Ropana’s ‘Sheesha’ trans. ‘The Mirror’) stand in contrast to tales that celebrate Sikh martyrdom and sacrifices for the sake of community honour. See Hina Nandrajog, ‘Sand Dunes of Memory: Edited Memories of Partition in Punjabi Short Fiction’, *Creative Forum: Journal of Literary and Critical Writings*, Special Issue: Partition Re/vised and 18, 1 (2005): 55–63.

49 Rajinder Singh Bedi (1910–84) short story writer in Urdu, is best known for his novel *Ek Chadar Maili Si* (lit. *A Dirty Sheet* trans. *I Take*)
of abducted women. This new status accorded to her is, however, really a subtle way of reminding her of the stigma of abduction. Having been touched by another man, she is no longer acceptable as the old Lajwanti whom her husband used to beat and then make up with. In an attempt to twist the irony further, Bedi represents Lajwanti as missing her former state of being, as her transformation into a goddess (as well as her concomitant desexualisation) now becomes unbearable to her. In contrast to Pritam’s story, however, the depiction of the ambivalence of the situation does not include an explicit radical critique of social norms. Instead, the narrative exposes the hypocritical emphasis on purity and chastity; a rough and tumble domestic situation is ironically posited in counterpoint to this. Bedi’s Lajwanti has limited capacity for self-reflection and is not able to envision an alternative to either iconic status or a marital relationship in which domestic abuse is a matter of course. The story’s mode of witnessing of the effects of idealism and violence and the interconnections between the two remains circumscribed by the character’s inability to look beyond the domestic sphere.\footnote{Didur underlines the sinister aspects of Lajwanti’s husband’s silence, which takes the form of an inequitable power relation that allows for the continuation of patriarchal patronage and his management of civic and domestic responsibilities. See Didur, Unsettling Partition, pp. 56–66, especially p. 64.}

In Jamila Hashmi’s ‘Banished’ (trans. M. U. Memon) a Muslim woman who narrates the story in the first person mode while on a journey to a local fair during the time of the Hindu festival Dussehra is constantly reminded of the situation of Sita in the Hindu epic, the Ramayana.\footnote{Jamila Hashmi (1929–88), the Urdu novelist and short story writer received the Adamjee Literary Award in 1960. See biographical note in Memon ed. An Epic Unwritten, pp. 363–64.} Her own experience of abduction and her memories of her childhood days and family life before are narrated retrospectively. The absence of choice for such women, treated as chattels by their abductors before being, in some cases, integrated into the family as lower status wives becomes clear. When the recovery operations are launched, the protagonist refuses the chance to be
rescued by relief officers, desiring instead that her brother come to take her home. The child that she has borne causes a further dilemma as she struggles to reconcile herself to her situation. The difference between her identity as an abducted woman and that of married women in families around her is underlined. Finally, the use of the mythic allusion to Sita becomes somewhat programmatic, in the repeated emphasis on the vitiated nature of such a time in which Sita has to live with Ravana (the mythic demon king of the Ramayana). The protagonist achieves a certain degree of ironic detachment as a witness through the invocation of such frames of reference. However, she is ultimately forced to compromise with the situation she is in, remaining beset by the perception of the incongruity of the moral/ethical codes underpinning the Hindu epic with reference to her situation. Unlike in Pritam’s story, there is no possibility that she may eventually develop a different kind of bond with her abductor, even though he does ask her to forget the memory of her abduction as they walk with the child towards the fair. Traumatic memory becomes a cage here, contaminating the present and the future in its cold embrace.52

Ashfaq Ahmad’s ‘Stony-hearted’ (trans. M. Asaduddin), in contrast, is narrated from the point of view of a relief officer working for the Pakistan government; his job is to locate abducted Muslim women on the Indian side in the Punjab where he once lived.53 Along the way he visits the family of Pitajee with whom his father

52 Major’s essay indicates the range of responses to the predicament of abduction on the part of the women, as well as to the possibility of recovery. After public concern had been raised about forcible recovery, especially the problem of children abandoned by repatriated women, the Indian and Pakistani governments agreed in 1954 that such women should not be forcibly repatriated. Amongst the Indian social workers, Rameshwari Nehru saw forcible recovery as state-sponsored re-abduction, while Mridula Sarabhai believed that the Indian state had a moral duty to recover every single abducted woman. See A. J. Major, ‘The Chief Sufferers: Abduction of Women During the Partition of the Punjab’ in Low and Brasted eds. Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence, New Delhi: Sage, especially pp. 64–65.

53 Ashfaq Ahmad (1924), major Pakistani short story writer, began writing stories in the 1950s, and has also edited literary magazines. See biographical note in Memon ed. Epic Unwritten, p. 360.
had struck up a deep friendship before the partition, where he meets Pimmi, a girl for whom he evidently has a certain fondness. The two friends share memories of the time before the partition as well as a fondness for Ghalib’s poetry. They also try to deal with the stereotypical ideas about Muslims as dangerous enemies expressed by Pimmi’s younger brother Amar. Meanwhile, a letter arrives at the room of the officer, describing the case of a woman whose parents had written about her from Pakistan. He is unable to respond to this application; he seeks to distance himself from the case by writing on the margin that he had attempted to find her, but found no trace. Pimmi happens to come in at this time and reads the application. She accuses him of having a heart of stone, a metaphor that acquires an additional resonance given the hint of cross-border romance.

Pimmi next startles him by asking if he can help her to ‘abduct’ a girl. She leads him to a house in which one of the women had been kept by Sajjan Singh, the man who had abducted her, and persuades the girl inside to leave the village with him immediately. The officer is left with his memory of Pimmi and a couplet of Ghalib that she quotes. Her evolving witness-sensibility causes her to turn against a perpetrator from her own community, realising the nature of the evil committed earlier and seeking to make some kind of moral restitution. The officer is forced to shed his attitude of bureaucratic indifference as he joins her in her plan to restore a victim to her kin, in a reversal of the pattern of abductions. However, the issue of stigma that might be faced on return is not such a major issue here, possibly because in Muslim families notions of ‘purity’ were not of such crucial importance, leading to fewer instances of ostracism.\(^{54}\)

Different strategies were thus adopted to voice the predicament of abducted women in the face of societal stigma. These stories, despite their limitations, indicate the difficulty of bearing witness in such a context. While this was especially the case with respect to the stories about the abducted women, stigma as regards survivor

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\(^{54}\) Urvashi Butalia, personal communication. Kamla Patel’s memoir of working extensively in the rehabilitation camps confirms this. As she observed, abducted Muslim women from Kashmir who had been recovered did not have a sense of having become impure, nor did they have any stigma attached to them. See K. Patel, *Torn from the Roots*, p. 173.
Short Stories about the Partition

stories persisted for many years after the partition. Such ‘fictive’ testimony to the fate of abducted women and attempts to foreground agency in these short stories became a way of bringing back an affective dimension while speaking the unspeakable, allowing for the possibility of a chain of witnesses emerging. ‘Pinjar’ remains the most significant counterstatement to positions taken up by right wing and nationalist ideologies as regards abducted women and ‘national’ honour. Pritam’s novella deals explicitly with the bodily experience of shame that sometimes led the abducted woman to regard herself as ‘other’, even leading to violence against the self. Nevertheless, a degree of ambivalence regarding the validity of such testimony in the absence of adequate rehabilitation measures or the prospect of justice as regards grievous wrongs remained. The problems arising from recovery processes initiated by the two nation states, leading to the need for recognition of the limits to ‘fictive’ testimony are addressed later in the chapter, with reference to another story by Manto.

**Counter-Images to the Effects of Dislocation and Exile**

Stories about the partition focused extensively on the widespread dislocation that took place in 1946–47. The long convoys of bullock carts and people trudging for hours across the plains of the Punjab in both directions left their distinctive imprint on the imagination. Krishan Chander’s story ‘Peshawar Express’ (trans. K. S. Duggal) uses the motif of the train as observer/witness to the carnage that took place across the vast regions of north-western India during this phase. The personification of the train as in some ways more human than the brutal murderers it carries to their destination is a simple device and works only to an extent. The descriptions of

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56 Krishan Chander (1914–76), prolific Urdu short story writer, was Secretary General of the Progressive Writers Association in India for many years. His collection *Hum Wahshi Hain* (lit. *We are Demons*) deals with the subject of the partition. See biographical note in Cowasjee and Duggal eds. *Orphans of the Storms*, p. 342.
mayhem and bloodshed along the train’s route, proportioned evenly amongst the communities, do not rise above the level of banality.\textsuperscript{57} This story by this well-known Progressive writer concludes with the utopian hope that one day there would be no Hindus and Muslims, just peasants and workers and human beings. The need for fairness and even-handedness often derived from Progressive writers’ commitment to secular values and a vision of a future without communal tensions. While perhaps a necessary gesture on the part of writer activists at the time, this could congeal at its worst into formula and a form of literary accounts keeping.\textsuperscript{58}

Bhisham Sahni, in his story ‘We Have Arrived in Amritsar’ (trans. author) gives a more ironic account of the changing attitudes of passengers in the trains filled with refugees and migrants. At first the Pathans in one of the compartments mock their fellow passenger, a slim Hindu, for his vegetarian preferences while on the Lahore side of the border. When the train approaches Amritsar, however, the formerly passive Hindu begins strutting like a street thug. He brutally strikes a Muslim who seeks to get into the moving train with his stick, causing him to fall off. The psychological nuances captured in this story are telling, indicating the demarcation of space in terms of dominance of one community over the other even in the train compartment and the mirroring of this dominance in the ego structure of individuals like the Hindu, especially as the train passes into a Hindu majority area. We find here a sharp criticism of the construction of hyper-masculinity in times of communal strife as well as the vindictiveness and ill will that often underlies the psychic make up of those on the receiving end of taunts about their (lack of) masculinity.

‘Pali’ (trans. author), again by Sahni, depicts the predicament of a young boy left behind during the tumultuous evacuation of

\textsuperscript{57} Memon makes the point that though this story was acclaimed as a masterpiece, its overstatement, lack of conviction, didacticism and intrinsic failure to come to grips with both the nature of evil and its relationship to individuals plague this story, as they do most of Chander’s writings on the partition. See Memon, ‘Partition Literature’, p. 393.

\textsuperscript{58} I am indebted for this idea to Dr. Shamim Hanfi. For a critique of the Progressive movement in its earlier phase, see G. Patel, \textit{Lyrical Movements}, pp. 83–130.
Hindu and Sikh refugees from western Punjab. The boy is adopted by a childless Muslim couple and made their own. He is taught the Islamic rituals of prayers at the insistence of the local Maulvi. As the recovery process begins the boy’s whereabouts are eventually discovered. His father reaches the Pakistani village where his foster parents had taken him due to their reluctance to give him up. When the father shares the anguish of the boy’s mother at having lost her child, his foster mother finally agrees to let him go. However, the Hindu priest in the village in East Punjab insists that Pali be purified of the Islamic ‘taint’ before he can rejoin the community. He thus becomes a pawn in the game of chess played out between the warring communities. This story satirises religious orthodoxy and mutual animosity that causes bigots on both sides to mirror one another’s attitudes. A figure of innocence, Pali practices rituals of worship as followed in the different homes in which he lives. Later, he becomes uncomprehending witness to the invidious and continuing effects of pollution taboos that govern inter-community relations. Sahni seems to put faith in the good sense of common folk who are not entirely taken in by the strictures of ‘holy’ men, even though they may be helpless to counter them. A certain humanist belief in the goodness of the common man underlies this story, unlike most stories by Manto.  

In a later story, ‘Take Me Home’ (trans. H. K. Trivedi), Sahni provides a nuanced account of life in a time of forced migration. In this story the narrator is a cynical witness who has seen it all. He observes the pandemonium at the railway station and an old man striving to get onto an overcrowded train. The elderly Sikh’s perturbation fails to elicit compassion amongst those around him; rather, he is seen as a potential source of trouble. He tries desperately to get water from the tap on the platform, but is unsuccessful. Those in the compartment scold the elderly Sikh for nearly missing the train, hurting himself in the process. The old man’s babbling to one and all to take him home ceases only when he is spoken to in his native tongue, the Multani dialect of Punjabi, spoken to him by an old woman who promises to take him home to his village Miyani. This goal to return home is, however, impossible to achieve. Nevertheless, Sahni underlines the importance of finding psychological solace in one’s mother tongue, which becomes a place in the psyche to revisit. The old Sikh’s blubbering comes to an end and those
in the compartment are relieved that he has been brought back from the brink of insanity. Indeed, the narrator wonders who would have looked after him at such a time as this. Sahni’s evocation here of the insensitivity and callousness of a certain kind of ‘commonsense’ witnessing carries devastating force. In a way a variation on an earlier theme, this story sensitively explores the predicament of those who lost not only their place of belonging, but also the emotional sustenance that comes from being within a community of people who speak one’s own language; here, not merely the vernacular. Sahni deliberately uses phrases from the Multani dialect of Punjabi in the Hindi original in order to emphasise the necessary texture and density of structures of feeling encoded in ‘dialect’, which springs from a sense of locality. This is embodied in the figure of the woman from his region who becomes an empathic witness to the old Sikh’s severe distress, as well as to the need for partial recuperation of selfhood through language.

Agyeya’s story ‘Getting Even’ (trans. Alok Rai) demonstrates the capacity of ordinary people to resist the drive towards revenge and retaliation. The main character is a Sikh who has lost all his family during the riots and who now travels on trains between Aligarh and Delhi, trying to protect women of the minority community whom he meets on the way. During one such journey several Hindus enter his compartment. One of the newcomers deliberately dwells on the atrocities on Hindu and Sikh women, describing the ‘retaliation’ in Delhi in the presence of a Muslim woman in the same compartment. Instead of joining the Hindu passenger’s attempt to put fear into her heart, the Sikh takes her part, putting an end to the

59 The translator Harish K. Trivedi points out that Sahni had been reflecting on the theme of displacement after the partition for over 25 years when he wrote this story. Personal communication.
60 The Multani dialect at the end is not meant to be generally intelligible and is partly translated even in the original. See H. K. Trivedi footnote in Sahni, ‘Take me Home’, trans. Harish K. Trivedi in Saint ed. Bruised Memories, p. 4.
‘gossip-mongering’ and defending her in an almost Gandhian attempt to ‘get even’. Redressal of his own wrongs being unlikely, he has instead become a witness–actor determined to shield all such women, who in some ways perhaps remind him of his own loss. This story is significant in countering the stereotypical presentation of the Sikh as bloodthirsty and prone to violence, testimony to the courage of many such survivors who did risk their lives in seeking to protect those from the ‘other’ community.

Mohan Rakesh in his story ‘His Heap of Rubble’ (trans. H. K. Trivedi) depicts the situation of Muslim refugees torn from their roots in the aftermath of violence in East Punjab. In this story, an old Muslim named Abdul Ghani revisits his former family home, now reduced to rubble. One of the few to be permitted to return across the border, he is overcome there by memories of his family who were killed during the violence. He naively believes that the people in the vicinity may have tried to help save them from outsiders. Abdul Ghani addresses the local wrestler Rakkha in this light; he is, ironically, the one who had murdered them. After the old man leaves the wrestler is beset by a form of nagging guilt, which does not allow him to gloat any longer as ‘master of the rubble’. A dog relentlessly barks at him; this makes him leave the spot that he had formerly occupied as a sign of his dominant position in the community. Rakesh sensitively captures the psychological scars left behind by acts of violence on Abdul Ghani as well as the wrestler. The poignancy as well as absurdity of Abdul Ghani’s nostalgic reminiscences to a killer is rendered with delicate strokes. The barking dog obdurately refuses to allow Rakkha to forget the past, compelling him to re-examine the shreds of his conscience and become (partial) witness to the consequences of his actions. While there may not be full-fledged acknowledgement of culpability, the residue of shame elicited from the perpetrator is nonetheless significant. Rakkha is compelled at the end to give up the territory to which he had laid a spurious claim.

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In contrast, ‘So the Witnesses Stated’ (trans. A. S. Judge and M. Hasan), by Fikr Taunsvi is a satire in which witnesses are summoned to give evidence against ‘a criminal called “refugee”’. Here the process of trial is parodied as perpetrators, political leaders, a camp commander and a landlord give evidence against the refugee figure. The grotesque inversion retains its punch, although the presentation of preposterous evidence by the various ‘witnesses’ is over-pitched at times. The refugee’s plight can only be discerned by inference; instead of being treated as a victim, the onus of blame for his situation is placed on him in the absence of the possibility of holding to account the perpetrators and powerful beneficiaries of the partition. The legal system is shown to be complicit in this travesty of justice, and actively abets the arraignment of the refugee by encouraging false witness.

While the separation from the homeland and a strong sense of exile and loss were the predominant themes to appear in writing about the movement across the border, the need to reclaim such lost territory in imaginative terms often led to the construction of landscapes of the mind and imagined cartographies. This entailed not merely indulgence in nostalgia for lost lands and possessions or sacred geographies. There was also an attempt to remap the distorted psychic terrain that resulted during the partition, including the widespread perception of ethical dysfunctionality and breakdown in mutual trust and confidence that was further intensified during the experience of migration. Significant stories tracked the movement across such a terrain of anxiety, suspicion and fear that had seemingly become the condition of existence. Writers devised counter-images often based on a perception of fluid borders even in the midst of violence, as we have seen.

**Witnessing the Breakdown of Familial Structures: Partition as Metaphor**

The situation of families divided by the partition elicited important writing in its aftermath, especially with respect to Muslim families.

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63 Fikr Taunsvi (1918–87) began writing as a journalist in Lahore, after which he returned to India and wrote important stories in Urdu on the partition. He was known for his penchant for humour and satire. See biographical note in M. Hasan ed. *India Partitioned*, vol. 1, pp. 102–256.
forced to leave behind relatives during migration. Badiuzzaman’s ‘The Final Wish’ (trans. Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint) depicts the situation of such divided Muslim families, split by ideological differences in the years leading up to the partition. The narrator of the story as a young boy becomes witness to the conflict between Kamal Bhai and ‘Gandhi’ Bhai, two brothers on opposite sides of the political rivalry between the Muslim League and the Congress. Kamal Bhai is amongst the most vociferous in his support for the Pakistan movement, leading demonstrations and giving fiery speeches citing Iqbal’s conception of the ‘Mard-e-Momin’ or the ‘real’ Muslim as a model. As David Gilmartin shows, Iqbal indeed played a crucial role in encouraging organisations of Muslim students in the 1930s. Even though Iqbal died in 1938, students continued to propagate his particular view of Pakistan. This included a notion of an active, individualistic yet intensely personal, almost mystical commitment to Islam that defined the Muslim ‘community’ in India.

However, when Kamal Bhai reaches Pakistan after migrating from his native of Gaya, he suffers from continual ill health, which he describes in his letters to the family in India. His chronic maladies are not merely due to homesickness, but rather on account of the profound sense of being alienated from his roots. The promises made and utopian visions put forward by the ideologues of the Pakistan movement are shown to be brittle and susceptible to oversimplification, as they lead to subsequent disillusionment for many who chose to migrate. The ‘nationalist Muslim’ figure, ‘Gandhi’ Bhai takes a critical view of Kamal Bhai’s espousal of Iqbal’s concept of the ‘Mard-e-Momin’, given its derivation from Nietzsche’s notion of the Overman. He feels that this can only lead to further self-destruction, just as the concept of the Overman led to mass destruction in Germany.

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64 Also see Naiyer Masud’s essay ‘Partition and the Urdu Short Story’, especially as regards writing about empty homes left behind by Muslim migrants. See Masud, pp. 130–34.

65 Syed Mohammad Khwaja Badiuzzaman (1928–86) began his literary career writing in Urdu, and was associated with the Progressive stream of Urdu writing in the 1940s and 50s under the pen name Badi Mashhadi. After a gap of some years, he wrote some of his important works in Hindi, including \textit{Ek Chuhe ki Maut} (lit. \textit{Death of a Mouse}). See biographical note in Saint ed. \textit{Bruised Memories}, p. 190.

‘Gandhi Bhai’ is taunted and mocked by his opponents as a traitor; he eventually dies seeking to keep lit the lamp of communal amity in independent India. Much of the story is narrated retrospectively after the receipt of a letter from Pakistan announcing the death of Kamal Bhai, who cannot hope to be buried amidst the graves of his ancestors with the performance of customary rituals. The poignancy of such situations arising out of political differences not merely between religious communities but also within Muslim families is sensitively portrayed. The partition becomes a metaphor as it sounds the death knell of possibilities of cohesion in familial and communitarian terms, as perceived by those too young at the time to realise the true significance of what was transpiring. The delayed trauma of the events at the time of rupture continues to beset the divided family at a later time as the narrator bears witness to irrevocable effects of division, including the unfinished task of mourning for those who have chosen self-exile.

The destructive effects of collective violence on familial structures also appear in Attia Hosain’s story ‘Phoenix Fled’. In this brief tale an old woman refuses to leave her ancestral home as her family departs, fleeing impending violence. She, however, cannot conceive of a life beyond the four walls of her home, which is suffused with memories of a lifetime. The fragility of her situation as witness to a lifetime of emotional investment in the creation of a home is embodied in the doll’s house that she as custodian of memory cautions the arsonists who invade her house at the end not to damage. Such heartlessness and disregard of the aged is also the theme of Joginder Paul’s story ‘The Thirst of Rivers’ (trans. A. Bhattacharya). Though taken along by her family, Bebe, the ageing protagonist of the story is neglected and left alone after the phase of migration is over. She continually plays with the bunch of keys that once opened the locks to her former home. However, Bebe is unable to unlock the doors to generative memory, remaining forever barred from the life-giving recollections that she nevertheless seeks insistently to revivify. These characters remain silent witnesses to outrages perpetrated in the wake of partition both within the family and by the ‘other’.

In ‘Roots’ (trans. M. Asaduddin) by Ismat Chughtai, on the other hand, a clear distinction is made between the public sphere, in which sloganeering leads to conflict between the two communities
in the North Indian town in which the story is set, and the personal sphere. Amma, the grandmother, becomes a mute witness to the hoisting of the different flags, the tricolour as well as that of the Muslim League, on rooftops of houses in close proximity in the neighbourhood during the phase of escalation of political rhetoric. Amma, however, refuses to leave the house in which she had spent a lifetime. While her family departs initially without her, leaving her to ruminate on the ruins of memory, there is a different kind of fictional resolution here. Their Hindu neighbour Roopchand brings the family back from the railway station, from where they are about to leave for Pakistan. The sustenance provided by a sense of roots and the inherent strength of intercommunity ties in the Ganga–Jamuna belt, given the shared cultural inheritance, is the underlying theme of the story. There is eventual vindication of Amma’s determination to remain in the domain of ancestral roots, this situation in some ways mirroring that of many Muslims who decided to stay on in India such as Ismat herself. The author, for long associated with the Progressive Writers movement, here effectively conveys a Progressive ideal without excessive preoccupation with the ‘message’, despite the element of sentimentality that characterises the ending.

Kamleshwar in ‘How Many Pakistans?’ (trans. S. Khanna) takes the idea of partition as metaphor further. Set in the post–partition period during a phase of continuing communal violence, this story depicts the experience of the protagonist, a young Hindu man who is forced to leave his hometown and his beloved, a Muslim girl named Banno, because they happen to be from different religious communities. The anguish of leaving Banno continues to haunt him.

67 Ismat Chughtai (1915–92) born in Budaun, wrote short fiction and novels in Urdu about the Muslim middle classes of Uttar Pradesh, where she grew up. She is known for her treatment of the nuances of women’s psychology and her attack on the endemic hypocrisy as regards women’s sexuality in Indian society. See biographical note in M. Hasan ed. India Partitioned, vol. 1, p. 279.

68 Kamleshwar (1932) has been associated with the Nai Kahani movement since its inception. He has written numerous short stories and novels in Hindi, including the recent Kitne Pakistan (2001: trans. Partitions 2005) besides editing the Hindi journal Sarika and writing film-scripts. See biographical note in Ravikant and Saint eds. Translating Partition, p. 232.
like the pain of a phantom limb as he drifts through life. Indeed, images of dismemberment proliferate in this story, as in the outbreak of rioting in Bhiwandi during which his grandfather’s arm is cut off. The refrain ‘how many Pakistans?’ becomes an existential cry of despair at the division of hearts and minds, stemming from an absence of feeling. The narrator meets Banno in a whorehouse at the end; she asks the fateful question ‘Anyone else?’ She thus touches the nadir of personal degradation that ensues after his separation from her on account of opposition from the two communities and her subsequent failed marriage to a man who sold his blood for money. There can be no return to the moment of primordial innocence, this bleak story suggests, as the spiral of self-degradation continues. The self can recognise this only during such moments of encounter when one may become witness to the erosion of integrity in another’s bitter smile.⁶⁹

We may thus note how failed cross-border romances and crumbling family ties achieve a metaphorical resonance in the context of processes of partitioning that are seen as ongoing. The realm of the personal and individual memory is perceived as fraught in such stories, irremediably tangled in changing social arrangements taking shape in the public realm. The multiple modes of violence, including less obvious forms within the family, are borne witness to by such stories that may include a bleak prognosis for the future to come.

**Critical Discourse on the Short Stories about the Partition: Dealing with Stereotypes and Voyeurism**

As Saros Cowasjee points out, the Progressive writers who had been a dominant force on the literary scene since the 1930s were

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thrown off balance by the carnage during the partition.\textsuperscript{70} Their belief in human rationality, according to him, left them with no words to express their disillusionment. Unable to explain the violence, many Progressive writers began to write elaborate accounts of violence in order to convey something of their sense of disgust. In the process they consciously avoided taking sides and put the blame equally on both warring factions.\textsuperscript{71} Cowasjee refers to the fact that the majority of writers chose to deal with violence of one kind or another, with abduction and rape often being the focus. As he points out, the less gifted writers tried to excel in graphic descriptions of women being physically abused and mutilated, often succeeding in making the painful nauseating instead. In his opinion there are few examples of work that transcend the horror and brutality of partition by giving a glimpse of compassion and understanding generated by suffering.\textsuperscript{72}

However, according to Cowasjee, such compassion has not been easy to capture in the short story. In his terms, by its very limitations of length and treatment the short story does not offer the scope for in-depth psychological study or the gradual transformation in character that the novel form does. For him the short story does, nevertheless, offer the writer an opportunity to grasp a vital moment in the lives of his characters and illuminate it.\textsuperscript{73} Contrary to his account, I contend that significant short stories, given their avoidance of expansive description, could allow for an appropriate concentration of affect and become a self-reflexive mode of testimony in the hands of talented practitioners.\textsuperscript{74} The dilation and need for elaborate descriptions of background, and the sequencing of episodes in terms of cause and effect in the case of the novel form could often descend into banality and repetition.\textsuperscript{75} This was especially the case with respect to writings of the first generation

\textsuperscript{70} See Cowasjee, Introduction in Cowasjee and Duggal eds. \textit{Orphans of the Storm}, pp. xii–xvi.

\textsuperscript{71} For Cowasjee, Krishan Chander’s ‘Peshawar Express’ is an example of such an attempt to be impartial, which leads to a balancing of Hindu and Muslim deaths with arithmetical precision. Ibid., p. xiii.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., pp. xii–xvi.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{75} I am indebted for this idea to Ananya Kabir.
after the partition. Modes of critical witnessing can, however, be identified in novels written some time after the event, as in the case of the testimonial fictions by Hosain, Hussein, Sahni, Vaid, Desai and others.

Earlier criticism has often been preoccupied with the question of how to categorise the various stories written about the partition. The critical discourse has ranged from questions relating to aesthetic criteria for assessing the stories to the issue of the politics of representation, especially with reference to community stereotypes. Some of the typologies created in the process have been somewhat restrictive as well. In Alok Bhalla’s opinion, the stories may be categorised as being communally charged, or stories of anger and negation, or stories of lamentation and consolation, or stories of the retrieval of memories. While the first category is based on the presumed ‘communal’ orientation of the story, the remaining three categories are mainly based on the theme or emotional valence of the story. The fact that there are considerable overlaps between the categories of writing problematises Bhalla’s classificatory strategy. Cowasjee points to the limitations of such attempts to group stories, given that many stories crossed boundaries and have more than one theme. Nevertheless, as an early effort at grouping this schematic account helped organise the vast array of stories collated by Bhalla. For the purposes of this present study, the problem of identifying significant modes of witnessing in the genre has led to a different emphasis, and set of clusters.

Shashi Joshi has effectively criticised Bhalla’s placement of stories such as Krishna Sobti’s ‘Where Is My Mother?’ (trans. Alok Bhalla) and Ahmad Nadeem Qasimi’s ‘Parmeshar Singh’ (trans. M. U. Memon) in the category of ‘communally charged’ stories. In Joshi’s terms the use of cultural stereotypes is not so much on account of

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76 I disagree, however, with Cowasjee’s citation of novels by Singh and Nahal as examples of writing that achieves psychological insight into the violence of the partition (Cowasjee, Introduction in Cowasjee and Duggal eds. Orphans of the Storm, pp. xiv–xv), as I have argued earlier with respect to novels by these writers in Chapters Two and Three.


79 Krishna Sobti (1925) writes fiction in Hindi and received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1980. See biographical note in Bhalla ed. Stories, vol. 2,
such a ‘communal charge’, but rather an illustration of how mainstream Indian society relies on such stereotypes to engage with its ‘others’. Rather, Joshi argues, in both these stories the stereotype is subjected to criticism to a degree. In Hasan’s and Asaddudin’s introduction to their collection of writings about Muslim life in India we get a more detailed account of the ways in which stereotypical notions of the Muslim travelled through history and culture. According to them, in the British era Orientalist ideas of Islam were commonplace; such notions of the ‘other’ were often internalised by the colonised society. This collection traces the resistance by writers to stereotypical images and representations of Muslim life, also with reference to the partition and its aftermath.

In an important later essay, Bhalla argues that Manto’s first set of stories about the partition written soon after 1947, such as *Black Margins*, ‘Toba Tek Singh’ or ‘Thanda Gosht’ (trans. ‘Cold Meat’) are fragmentary, spasmodic and unremittingly violent. On the other hand, for him, Manto’s second set of stories about the partition written between 1951 and 1955 are more complex in their emplotment, and more concerned with the deep structural relationship between the carnage of the partition and human actions in the past. In Bhalla’s opinion, while the first set of stories are derisive tales of a degenerate society, the second set of stories are both parables of lost reason and demonic parodies of the conventional history of the national movement. According to him, for Manto, rather than 1947 being a celebratory moment, emerges as the culmination of a regular and repeated series of actions, which Bhalla calls ‘bloody

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81 See Hasan and Asaduddin eds. Introduction to *Image and Representation*, pp. 1–16.

82 Such stories include Manto’s ‘1919 ki Ek Baat’. See Alok Bhalla, ‘A Dance of Grotesque Masks: A Critical Reading of Manto’s “1919 ki Ek Baat”’

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tracks’ that disfigure all the geographical and temporal sites of the nationalist struggle. He argues that, in these later stories the partition appears not as an unfortunate rupture in historical time, but a continuation of it. It is these ‘bloody tracks’ backwards into time that drive home the realisation that violence has characterised every chronological segment of the history of India from the beginning of the century to 1947; according to Bhalla, it is not merely an aspect of colonial rule but a structural aspect of the struggle against it. The Gandhian intervention was thus a temporary and precarious recovery of the ground for virtue, clarity, will and peace. As Bhalla argues, in Manto’s view, violence transforms India before 1947 into a place where one can see nothing but a dance of grotesque masks. However, this argument needs to be qualified in relation to ‘Toba Tek Singh’, which appeared in 1953. In this story the sense of the partition as a distinctive rupture is predominant, rather than an emphasis on the continuity of violence (indeed, the pre-partition era is represented as a phase of relative amity, rather than as being marked by pathological tensions or violence).

According to Jason Francisco, in contrast, the partition stories may be categorised as stories of rupture and loss, stories of betrayal and protest and lastly, stories of repair and memory. There is an implicit notion of periodisation at work as well in this broad classification, which has a certain heuristic value. Francisco’s categorisation has a thematic basis, which he at points links to ideological


83 Ibid., pp. 28–30.

84 Bhalla furthers this argument in a scathing criticism of Khalid Hasan’s translation of Manto’s stories, in a later essay. His analysis of Manto’s story ‘Yazid’ in another article reminds us of the serious problems with translations into English by Hasan, which are often inaccurate, especially with regard to the titles. See Bhalla, ‘A Dance’, pp. 19–38. Also see Asaduddin’s criticism of Hasan’s translations on similar grounds in M. Asaduddin, ‘Manto in English: An Assessment of Khalid Hasan’s Translations’ in Bhalla ed. Life and Works, pp. 159–71.

influences. For instance, Francisco too refers to the strong influence of the Progressive Writers movement on early stories, which sought to evoke disgust, disillusionment and horror through gory descriptions of violence.\(^{86}\) Such stories predominate in the collection edited by Cowasjee and Duggal. Stories such as ‘Revenge’ by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas and ‘Kali Raat’ by Aziz Ahmad (trans. Faruq Hasan) illustrate this point.\(^{87}\) In ‘Revenge’ Hari Das, a lawyer from Lyallpur whose wife threw herself into the river and whose daughter Janki was brutally raped during the partition, is determined to take revenge for the sadistic treatment meted out to her. He is eventually offered the chance to have his way with a Muslim girl, by a pimp who promises the very best, a veritable hoor (or angel). The girl sings for him and her outraged innocence reminds him in a way of his daughter. But the impulse to take revenge is so powerful that he suppresses any inclination towards mercy and advances towards her with his knife ready. When he disrobes her, however, he finds below her brassiere two horrible round scars. The revenge that he sought to perpetrate had already been pre-empted by previous assailants, evidence of which shocks the lawyer into revulsion. However, the depiction of atrocity also includes an element of the lurid, as we move too easily from the memory of earlier violence to the act of revenge and the witnessing at the end by Hari Das of the spectacle of the Muslim girl’s mutilated body. The impact on the consciousness of the young girl forced to work as a prostitute after such brutalisation is not elaborated upon, except in a conventional way as a passive victim. Further, the spectacle of her ravaged body lends itself to a kind of voyeurism, albeit in the name of the ethical. The story is marked by a degree of rawness and an insufficient development of the psychological transformation of the (eventual) witness figure.

In Aziz Ahmad’s ‘Kali Raat’ the violence on the trains is described in graphic detail as a young Muslim, Ghazanfar searches

\(^{86}\) Ibid., p. 373.

\(^{87}\) Khwaja Ahmed Abbas (1914–87), novelist, screenwriter and producer, wrote in English and Urdu. His autobiography I am Not an Island has received considerable recognition. See biographical note in Cowasjee and Duggal eds. Orphans of the Storm, p. 341. Aziz Ahmad (1913–78) taught English before he migrated to Pakistan in 1948. He has written renowned scholarly works in English besides writing fiction in Urdu. See biographical note in Cowasjee and Duggal eds. Orphans of the Storm, p. 341.
for his family on the Grand Trunk Express which had been stopped by killers between Delhi and Mathura and whose passengers had been slaughtered and raped.\textsuperscript{88} The survivor Sikander is left with the horrific memory of what had transpired, even as his brother Ghazanfar searches for him in the hospital where he lies in a cast. There is some attempt to link the violence during the partition to warfare in general, with an allusion to Aristotle’s turning his face away after witnessing the casualties on the battlefield perpetrated by the army of his student Alexander. There is also a reference to the possibility of Nietzsche’s Overman climbing down the ladder of evolution in shame after witnessing this degree of violence. However, the story does seem to wallow in its descriptions of blood and gore, ending on an almost nihilistic note.

Such stories are further illustrations of the occasional tendency towards a ‘pornography of violence’ mentioned earlier.\textsuperscript{89} This is not to say that such voyeuristic tendencies were not rife in society at large, especially amongst the supporters of the Hindu right. Amrit Rai’s story ‘Filth’ (trans. Alok Bhalla) satirises the triumphalist recounting of ‘deeds’ by well-off Hindus in a train compartment who move effortlessly from national (Hindu–Muslim) to international (India–Pakistan) issues and then to a discussion of the rising cost of food at Nirula’s hotel.\textsuperscript{90} Slaughter becomes a matter of statistics, and the men take pride that Hindu militancy had been brought to the fore by the partition, boasting that the ratio of Muslims killed

\textsuperscript{88} As Swarna Aiyar shows, the first actual sabotage of a train took place on 9 August, when a Pakistan Special Train carrying government employees and their families from Delhi to Karachi was derailed fifteen miles west of Bhatinda in East Punjab. No attack followed and there were few casualties, but the sabotage was meticulously planned. Retaliation in Lahore began immediately, and trains were targeted in particular, with the railway station becoming the scene for widespread carnage on 14–15 August. Following this trains became targets for reprisal killings on both side of the border, especially the special trains carrying refugees. See Swarna Aiyar, “August Anarchy”: The Partition Massacres in Punjab, 1947’ in Low and Brasted eds Freedom, Trauma, Continuities, p. 18.


\textsuperscript{90} Amrit Rai (1921–96) was the editor of Nai Kahaniyan, besides publishing short stories and novels in Hindi. He is the author of an acclaimed biography of his father Munshi Premchand. See biographical note in Bhalla ed. Stories, vol. 3, p. 257.
to Hindus in the Punjab was now 3: 2, with Hindus no longer the ‘eternal punching bags’. Such vicarious excesses may be countered with the numbing in psychic terms that often led to a situation of inarticulateness or muteness amongst survivors, as Veena Das has shown, even as language itself was brutalised.\footnote{See Das, \textit{Life and Words}, p. 8, also ‘Rev. of \textit{Stories about the Partition of India}, ed. Alok Bhalla’, \textit{Seminar} 420 (1994): 57–58, also Das and Nandy, ‘Violence, Victimhood’, p. 190. Das’ more recent treatment of Manto is discussed in greater detail later.} Das cites Manto’s writing as being able to negotiate the perils of representation of violence with restraint and economy of expression.\footnote{See Das, ‘Rev. of \textit{Stories}', pp. 57–58.} Some Progressive writers, however, as is well known, denounced Manto’s stories as ‘obscene’.\footnote{For an account of denunciations of Manto’s stories as ‘sick’ and ‘reactionary’ by prominent Progressives such as Ali Sardar Jafri and Sajjad Zaheer, see Flemming, \textit{Another Lonely Voice}, pp. 28–29. It was Manto’s view however, that as Ahmed Ali suggests, rather than Manto deserting the Progressive Writers Movement, the movement had deserted him (cited in Flemming, \textit{Another Lonely Voice}, p. 30). Manto accused the Progressives of branding his \textit{Black Margins} as reactionary solely because of his association with Muhammad Hasan Askari, an outspoken opponent of the movement. In his introduction to the first Pakistan edition of the collection \textit{Chughd} he concluded ‘Finally I want to say that I don’t care at all about progressivism, but the back and forth leaps of the famous progressives hurt a lot’ (quoted in Flemming, \textit{Another Lonely Voice}, p. 30). In his later writings he admitted the circumstantial and tenuous nature of his relationship with the Progressive Writers Movement. Even so, as Flemming points out, there was a remarkable congruity between his ideas and those espoused in the broader earlier manifestation of the movement. The emphasis on social upliftment of the underprivileged, and the anti-colonialist nationalist views then articulated were shared by Manto as a young aspiring writer, even though eventually he may have been more influenced by Freudian psychology. As he argued, literature is a symptom of the state of a society: ‘Literature is not a sickness but rather a response to sickness. It is also not a medicine…literature is a measure of temperature, of its country, of its nation. It informs of its health and sickness’ (quoted in Flemming, \textit{Another Lonely Voice}, p. 32). Manto also argued that new writing and new trends in literature continue to emerge, and reiterated his belief in the need for literature to reflect changing social conditions realistically, if not in the efficacy of literature in bringing about such changes. See Flemming, \textit{Another Lonely Voice}, pp. 32–33.}
obituary achieved a more balanced appraisal. As I have argued, a self-reflexive approach characterises the writing of Husain and Manto, in which witnessing the witnesses leads to the possibility of self-critique.

In Flemming’s terms, Manto’s turn to modern forms of allegory in some of his later stories brought him close to non-realistic forms of writing. Furthermore there is a shift from the use of a distant third person narrator in his earlier stories to the insertion of a narrator–observer named Manto in many of his later stories. This allowed Manto to increase the illusion of reality and bring out the immediacy of certain situations which he sought to portray, although he abandoned this technique in stories in which he desired a more ironic perspective such as in many of the other partition stories, including ‘Toba Tek Singh’. The multiple mediations achieved through the use of first person as well as third person techniques of narration enabled Manto to achieve more complex testimonial effects in his attempt to probe the psychic debris left behind by the violence, decomposing the residue of traumatic memory rather than monumentalising the memory of the event.

‘Tassels’ (trans. S. M. Mirza) in particular exemplifies this experimental turn towards a non-realist, stream-of-consciousness style of narration verging on incoherence. Here the intensification of the central character’s feelings of alienation and isolation is achieved through the formal device of a stream of images mimicking the chaos and meaninglessness of life and the disintegration at the psychic level undergone by the protagonist who obsessively remembers the tassels worn by soldiers on their uniforms. The woman paints bizarre designs on her body, observing herself in the mirror, telling her friend who comes by the Pakistan Mail, car number 9612, PL (one of the few precise references) that she had grown an extra stomach. Eventually she paints a scarf with tassels around her neck, an image that tightens and ultimately strangles her to death.

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95 Furthermore, as Fleming elucidates, though his earlier stories were influenced by Chekhov’s impressionist style, Manto primarily wrote stories with well-constructed plots in the style of Maupassant. See Flemming, Another Lonely Voice, pp. 96–97.
96 Ibid., pp. 98–101.
98 Ibid., pp. 285–86.
As Veena Das shows, this was indeed the predicament of many women unable to articulate their grief and suffering as the usual codes of mourning were truncated and public expression of mourning became impossible, given that many of the perpetrators were family members, or part of the same society.\textsuperscript{99} Such women told Das that they had had to drink poison, a metaphor often used in lieu of bearing witness.\textsuperscript{100} Das’ reading of ‘Tassels’ represents in symbolic form the situation of women made passive witnesses by the partition; they grew two stomachs, one normal one and the other to be able to bear the fruits of violence within themselves. As Das argues, this juxtaposition of surreal images connotes the birth of the nation as independent entity, giving rise to citizens but also simultaneously to monsters.\textsuperscript{101} The rupturing of the possibility of testimony in such a context, affecting even the possibility of self-witness, becomes evident in this story. For testimony to become meaningful, conditions need to be extant which allow for a listening to such devastating disclosures about the ravaged inner self. During the partition, the story suggests, such conditions were not obtained, leading to a crisis of witnessing.\textsuperscript{102}

Das writes that women drank poisonous knowledge so that life could continue, while men longed for an unheroic martyrdom by which they could invite the evil back upon themselves and humanise the enormous looming images of nation and sexuality. But it was not through political discourse that this was achieved, since here speech came often too easily as in the political debates on abducted women in the Constituent Assembly that focused mainly on questions of national honour in the belief that after the restoration of the women one could leave the horrendous events behind. It is only through the witnessing of this truth of the woman’s violation that true mourning could be defined, as the pain of the other came to be housed not merely in language but in the body as well. For Das, this task is the most difficult one, more so than that of

\textsuperscript{99} Das ‘Language and the Body’, pp. 82–89.
\textsuperscript{100} The following paragraphs draw on the argument of Veena Das in ‘Language and Body’, especially p. 82–9. A revised version of this essay appears in Das, \textit{Life and Words}, pp. 38–58.
\textsuperscript{101} As Das suggests, such is the fate of the men in Husain’s “The City of Sorrow”, who carry their own corpse with them wherever they go. See Das, ‘Language and Body’, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{102} For a discussion of crises of witnessing in the context of the Holocaust, see Felman and Laub, Foreword to \textit{Testimony}, pp. xiii–xix.
breaking silences hitherto considered taboo, which might lead to the capacity for unearthing ‘hidden’ facts being used as a weapon. Instead, she underlines the need for a division of labour as regards mourning between men and women.\textsuperscript{103}

In a later essay Das describes the way in which stories of victims and survivors may be hooked into popular culture.\textsuperscript{104} The trope of the innocent victim may here provide the cover to attempts to engage in voyeurism, generating the potential to open up suspect spaces in which stories of suffering are deployed in dividing practices, separating ‘innocent’ victims from ‘guilty’ ones. Instead, Das argues for a different picture of the victim and survivors in which time is not frozen, but allowed to do its work. According to her, an ethic of responsibility must underlie recovery processes based on a refusal of complicity with violence and open to the pain of the ‘other’.\textsuperscript{105} An understanding of the necessity for the ‘work of time’ may contribute to societal healing processes, also through the acknowledgement of the persistence of problematic forms of memorialisation in political communities. Such ‘storytelling’ practices may inadvertently lead to the continuation of retaliatory modes of violence that attempt to distinguish between such ‘innocent’ and ‘guilty’ victims to justify present-day discrimination and violence.

Manto’s short stories provide an ironic counterpoint to such tendencies as he came to terms with ambiguities in the discourse of the witnesses to the violence during the partition. Even the exercise of rehabilitation was marked by ambivalence as women who had been abducted were in many cases forcibly recovered from homes where they had begun to find a new life and brought across the border, according to the provisions of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill (1949).\textsuperscript{106} An atypical instance of ‘fictive’ testimony appears in Manto’s story ‘Khuda ki Kasam’ (trans. K. Hasan as ‘The Dutiful Daughter’).\textsuperscript{107} In this story, set in 1948 after collective violence during which many families had

\textsuperscript{103} Das ‘Language and the Body’, p. 88.


\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p. 297.

\textsuperscript{106} Menon and Bhasin, Borders, pp. 216–118; Das, Critical Events, pp. 55–83.

\textsuperscript{107} The title of the translated version of the story ‘The Dutiful Daughter’ does not convey the irony implicit in the original ‘Khuda ki Kasam’, lit.
been split apart, the narrator sardonically wonders about the efforts to restore abducted women to their families, and whether their children would belong to Hindustan or Pakistan. There is an alternation between the first person account of the narrator (whose cynical tone is close to that of the Manto-persona of earlier stories) and the story of a liaison officer engaged in recovery work. The officer tells the narrator the story of an old Muslim woman who had been searching for her ‘abducted’ daughter for many months. One day a couple, a Sikh and a woman with her face half-covered, pass her on the street. The Sikh stops, realising she is his wife’s mother. The old woman recognises her daughter as well. However, in an ironic reversal, her daughter walks away, leaving her elderly mother behind. The officer assures the old woman that her daughter is dead, and the old woman falls in a heap on the road. The officer here becomes witness to an instance of rejection of both the narrative of restoration of ‘purity’ and ‘honour’ underpinning state sponsored recovery efforts, as well as conventional notions of filial duty.

There is no judgment of the woman’s action in the witness figure’s description. Indeed, a suspension of judgment may be necessary to arrive at a more empathetic understanding of her situation and the perjury by the witness-figure, at a time when reports on violence saturated the senses. In this story-within-a-story, a play of perspectives between first person accounts of two different narrators generates a sense of the elusiveness of violence as well as of its manifestations in concrete form. We are also reminded that the witness may live through an event, but is not necessarily outside the ramifications of the event, and does not occupy an Archimedean point from which observation is possible.

‘Promise in God’s Name’, which highlights the discrepancy between sworn testimony in the court of law and the perjury committed by the relief officer.

108 Das discusses the complex legal questions as regards abducted women’s children, who were regarded as wards of the state if not accepted by the mother’s family. See Das, Critical Events, pp. 73–78.

109 Ibid., p. 78.

110 For further discussion of cases of occasional unreliability in witness accounts in the experience of interviewers of partition survivors, who had to even negotiate instances of falsification, see Nandy, ‘The Invisible Holocaust’, p. 129.
Primo Levi’s meditation on the impossibility of becoming a ‘complete’ witness becomes even more pertinent in this context.\textsuperscript{111} As Levi argues, the existence of the ‘grey zone’ and the consequent lacunae within testimony does not exculpate the survivor from the imperative to bear witness, even if as proxy witness, to the ‘untestifiable’.\textsuperscript{112} The abducted women’s situation of being stigmatised and silenced, unable to publicly articulate their trauma till recently, was certainly different in crucial ways from the figure of the ‘living dead’ in Auschwitz.\textsuperscript{113} Furthermore, the ‘zones of irresponsibility’ were ushered in during reciprocal partition violence, paradoxically, in the very claim to assume mutual responsibility for the abducted women by the two nation–states during the ‘recovery’ operations.\textsuperscript{114} Manto’s story offers a devastatingly ironic instance of

\textsuperscript{111} Levi, \textit{The Drowned}, pp. 22–52.

\textsuperscript{112} Levi, \textit{The Drowned}, p. 64; Agamben, \textit{Remnants of Auschwitz}, p. 41. For Agamben the untestifiable has a name: in the jargon of Auschwitz, it is ‘der Muselmann’, literally ‘the Muslim’, the term in this death camp for those who had lost the will to live. This term was derived from the (Orientalist) conception of the Muslim as one who submits unconditionally to God, and applied to those who had lost a sense of external reality and become unable to respond to events around them in the concentration camps. It was also a reference to the stooping posture of such inmates, who reminded many of the posture of Muslims while praying. It is on behalf of the ‘Muselmann’ that the proxy witness must speak, even though he may have no ‘story’ to tell. See Agamben, \textit{Remnants of Auschwitz}, pp. 41–46.

\textsuperscript{113} A major difference that may be identified is that while just as in the case of the Holocaust certain stories were silenced (though the form this silence took was different during the partition as well, modulated by the specificities of cultural and societal context, as we have seen), during the 1947 events there was a simultaneous and problematic investment in production of stories about the victims of violence at the level of the community. See Das, ‘Rev. of \textit{Stories}’, pp. 57–58. Das brilliantly analyses the case of Manjit, an abducted woman who remarried, but was continuously subjected to taunts by her husband’s family based on suspicion of the possibility that she had been raped. As Das also shows, after the fantastic violence of the partition, ordinary ways of referring to male aggression lost their valence; words appeared as the broken shadows of words. See Das, \textit{Life and Words}, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{114} Agamben, \textit{Remnants of Auschwitz}, pp. 20–22. For an earlier cited analysis of the ramifications of the complicity between the two nation–states during such attempts to restore ‘national honour’, see Mufti, \textit{Enlightenment}, p. 205.
proxy witnessing, mediated here through the perjury and abdication of his official duty by the representative of the state, the ‘relief’ officer.

Manto, who approached madness in his own truncated lifespan, on occasion became a witness of witnesses. Unlike some partition stories which try and provide justice where none was to be had, through a mechanical apportionment of blame and an attempt to establish an equality of suffering, his work provides a sense of the struggle to deal with traumatic memory and its aftermath. Given the absence of an adequate societal reckoning with the legacy of violence, Manto maps the contours of the perverse reasoning and necrophilia characteristic of the partition years, also indicating the at times uncertain grounds for the project of witnessing. The ambivalences generated by limit situations are mirrored in the ambivalence of his stories’ endings. The reader is implicated in his stories as witness to extreme degradation of the self. The casual brutality of soldiers on both sides of the Indo–Pak border towards a dog to whom they seek to assign a nationality in ‘The Dog of Tetwal’ (trans. Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint), may be contrasted to the almost arbitrary sacrifice by a bohemian Jewish girl who saves the life of an innocent stranger from the Sikh community in the midst of rioting in his story ‘Mozel’ (trans. Tahira Naqvi). In Manto’s best short fiction there is an ethical engagement with historical trauma, both intense and responsible. He devises, as it were, modes of decomposing the psychic debris of collective violence, in contrast to writing in which its residue congeals into formula or banality, whether as Right-wing stereotype or progressive message. Later writers continued to affirm the ethical imperative underpinning his testimonial fictions as well as the salience of the ironic perspectives he generated, even as communal/sectarian violence continued to bedevil independent nation–states in South Asia.

115 See Nandy, “The Days of the Hyaena”.

116 Ibid.

117 For a separate and more detailed analysis, see Ravikant and Saint, “The Dog of Tetwal” in Context, in Translating Partition, pp. 94–104.

The Partitioning of Consciousness

As discussed earlier with reference to important novels, the effects of partition violence were not restricted to the body, but also affected modes of being and consciousness. The historical trauma of partition and subsequent rise of jingoistic forms of nationalist consolidation further eroded pluralistic spaces and practices that had allowed for the possibility of dialogue across the boundaries of religion and sect. At this time, significant short stories depicted the erasure of modes of civilisational memory that had preserved such a covenant.

Surendra Prakash’s ‘Dream Images’ (trans. M. Asaduddin) is a meditation on the effects of such erasure of civilisational memory.\(^{119}\) In this story the protagonist, a Hindu migrant, dreams of a journey in which he returns to his homeland, the town in which he spent his childhood and youth before the partition. He takes his family along with him and revisits some of the key places with which he has strong associations. He is keen to meet old friends, including some of the Muslim Urdu writers whom he had been close to during his formative years. But he is unable to make the connection, even though he tries to do so with the help of those he meets on the street. At a certain point in the story his children disappear and the distraught parents seek desperately to find them. It is, however, as if this may never be realised. In this story the inability to convey the nuances of the culture inherited from the past to the next generation, who lack knowledge of the Urdu language and for whom much of the previous life of their parents is quite alien, is symbolically presented in the surreal episode of the disappearance.\(^{120}\) The hiatus between past and present and its psychological

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\(^{119}\) Surendra Prakash (1930) is the pen name of Surinder Kumar Oberoi. Born in Lyallpur in undivided Punjab, he migrated to Delhi during the partition years. After a stint with All India Radio, he moved to Bombay. He has published collections of short stories and a novel in Urdu, as well film–scripts. See biographical note in Hasan ed. *India Partitioned*, vol. 1, p. 267.

\(^{120}\) For an account of the shrinking space occupied by Urdu in independent India and the decline in the number of Hindus and Sikhs writing Urdu, see Aijaz Ahmad, ‘In the Mirror of Urdu’, p. 215.
consequences, including the failure to transmit key values and ideas as well as shared cultural memories as encoded in the Urdu language, is incisively rendered here. The dream passage contains an admixture of nostalgia as well as dread regarding the failure to communicate syncretic values to the next generation, who symbolically cease to be part of the cultural continuum. The partial erasure of the parents’ own civilisational memories may be the inevitable psychological cost of waking up and rejoining the children in the ‘real’ world to which they now belong, a nightmarish paradox to which the story provides oblique testimony.\textsuperscript{121}

A remarkable story by Ashfaq Ahmad that further tracks the choking away of syncretism and pluralistic practices in Pakistan after 1947, ‘The Shepherd’ (trans. M. U. Memon), depicts the bond between a young Muslim boy and his guide, Dauji, a Hindu and former herder of goats who seeks to impart wisdom gleaned from his own Sufi teacher to the young boy while coaching him for his exams. After the partition, local Muslim hooligans humiliate Dauji, challenging him to recite the \textit{kalma} (which he knows better than they do) and cutting off his \textit{bodhi}, or sacred knot of hair. As Dauji leaves to return to his former occupation of tending goats, his former student who stands nearby, a helpless witness, is reminded of Farida (Baba Farid), the Sufi saint of the long flowing hair. The greatest damage done through such crude and violent assertions of identity may be to such syncretic modes of exchange and transmission of shared lore, lost in the arid cultural landscapes of the newly formed nation states, Ahmad seems to suggest.

In Intizar Husain’s story ‘A Letter from India’ (trans. V. Adil and Alok Bhalla), the poignant situation of divided families twenty five years after independence and partition is articulated in the form of an extended epistle written by a Muslim from India to his relatives in Pakistan. The impact of migration on the cultural inheritance of Muslims who left for Pakistan is the subject of the story. In the letter-writer’s view, the mohajirs seem not to be able to live up to the

\textsuperscript{121} Also see M. Asaduddin’s analysis of the story, which underlines the ‘memory of the mutually interactive Indo-Muslim culture’ and the deeply felt religiosity of the people that underpins the story. See. Asaduddin, ‘Against Forgetting: Memory as Metaphor in “Dream Images”’ in Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint eds. \textit{Translating Partition}, pp. 120–29, especially p. 122.
memory of the (Saiyid) lineages they hail from, though his notions of faded glory are presented somewhat ironically. As the letter writer says, ‘We have neither a place which is our own, nor a history to remember’.\textsuperscript{122} The poignant situation of such migrants is borne witness to in epistolary form, a fragmentary mode of conveying distress at the splitting of the self. Furthermore, the story is self-consciously aware regarding the dangers of wallowing in shallow nostalgia and ersatz (or artificially constructed) memory through partial and idealised reconstructions of the past.

Husain’s story ‘The Stairway’ (trans. M. U. Memon) articulates anxiety as regards processes of recollection and remembrance for Mohajir communities in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{123} In this tale a group of boys on a rooftop complain of shared insomnia. After migration, commemoration in their community of Shias in exile during Moharram seems to be devoid of the same kind of intensity. They attempt to recollect the mode of performance of key rituals in the town from which they migrated to Pakistan. However, such sustaining remembrance remains elusive, leading to restlessness and sleep-deprivation.\textsuperscript{124} An image of the \textit{alam} (sacred staff) carried out of the \textit{imambara} (abode of the \textit{imam} or holy person) during Moharram in the town from which he migrated eventually appears to Razi, a mohajir from Uttar Pradesh, in a dream.\textsuperscript{125} However, his dream stands in sharp contrast to the fact that in actuality, that year the \textit{alam} had not been carried out of the \textit{imambara} in his native town where Razi’s mother, now old and weak, decided to stay after everyone else migrated. Indeed, life for the mohajirs at times seems poised between the desire to dream and harsh reality. At the end of the story Saiyid, a man suffering from a crisis of identity due to his loss of memory,


\textsuperscript{123} Cowasjee points to a new direction in partition fiction while referring to Husain’s ‘The Stairway’ which, according to him, represents not merely the bloodcurdling consequences of the partition, but its far ranging effects on the human mind. See Cowasjee, Introduction in Cowasjee and Duggal eds. \textit{Orphans of the Storm}, p. xxi.


\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 116.
Short Stories about the Partition

says in a mysterious voice that he thinks he is going to be able to see a dream. This is partly as a result of Razi’s disclosure. One may argue that this story indicates Husain’s awareness of the limits to literary remembrance as a mode of testimony to intangible scars on the migrant psyche, especially for those seeking to retrieve a lost sense of sacred time.

Husain’s story ‘The City of Sorrow’ (trans. V. Adil and Alok Bhalla), written in the allegorical mode, takes on questions of guilt and identity and raises them to a metaphysical level in its description of the fate of three men, apparently dead, who narrate horrific episodes in which they were forced into the worst of abominations, only after which they realized they were truly dead. The evacuation of ethical sensibility in the face of atrocity and the slippage into extreme degradation of the self leads to a situation in which such fallen souls are forced to wander, seeking to ascertain whether they are dead or alive. This nightmarish parable moors itself in the Buddhist idea of suffering as a universal principle of existence, which itself may be treated as an extended illusion. Plumbing the zero point through narrated ‘testimony’ allows the wandering souls to realise the extent of their loss of selfhood, as well as derive consciousness of their true state of being, in this case, death. In this allegorical narrative, testimony acquires a different valence as a partial mode of recuperation of the shamed self. The ethical imperative of recovering and owning up to the memory of atrocity, ironically enough, becomes operational only in the afterlife.

Furthermore, in this story the possibility that in the absence of careful and attentive listening the suppressed testimony of survivors may metamorphose into grotesque forms becomes apparent. For the men in the story owe their existence, paradoxically enough, to the existence of the others. One of them even expresses his anxiety that if one of the others withheld his testimony he would cease to exist, becoming a mere shadow. While the story may draw on aspects of earlier genres, such as the ghost story or tale of the supernatural, its situatedness in a post-partition context is unmistakable.

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126 Ibid., p. 129.
127 Also see Memon’s discussion of this story, in Memon, ‘Partition Literature’, pp. 406–7.
The existential dilemma of the lost souls who are condemned to wander acquires an additional historical resonance due to our awareness of this subtext, which underpins the narrative. The perpetrators, the citizen monsters, it may be argued remain with us, given the culture of impunity and complicity that developed in post-Independence nation states in South Asia. Meanwhile, let alone justice, adequate processes of acknowledgement and critical recognition of the lasting effects of historical trauma have not been set into motion. Consequently, displaced collectivities on both sides of the border may continue to restlessly traverse the barren cultural landscapes of post independence nation–states in South Asia, searching for an ethical mooring. Without such a mooring they may be doomed to remain in a state of being like the lost souls, uncertain whether they are alive or dead. Husain’s story bears proxy witness to such less discernible effects of collective violence, testimony to the remainder of historical trauma that continues to circulate, likely to haunt generations to come.

As these stories indicate, it is difficult to classify partition stories in terms of mutually exclusive compartments. Stories grouped in the last cluster in particular seem to encompass many issues addressed in the previous clusters. Both in terms of themes and formal resources these stories constitute, along with Manto’s stories, testimony to the effects of the partitioning of consciousness and the more indirect forms of violence to both modes of temporality and civilisational memory. This chapter has not attempted to sharply demarcate stories in terms of national origin of the authors, chronology or the language in which originally written, whether Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi or English. This is partly due to problems with dating and chronology of stories in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi that are often published and republished without inclusion of comprehensive details. For instance, the anthologies that comprise the basis for the selection of stories analysed here do not provide original dates of publication, though in some cases dates can be ascertained. Nonetheless, through such juxtapositions of stories from both sides of the border, editors and anthologists have sought to restore a sense of the commonality of collective suffering.

As we have seen, short stories about the partition often sharply interrogate the certitudes of nationalist modes of self-formation, subverting the basis for a ‘national realism’. Indeed, the most interesting examples of the genre consciously seek to make the borders
between self and other, past and present, more fluid as they imaginatively revisit the moment of final separation in 1947 and its afterlife. In such short stories a mode of ‘fictive’ testimony is devised that allows for the possibility of further reinvention in the context of continued instances of sectarian/communal violence, given the danger of infinite replication of the partition not only in geopolitical, but in socio-cultural, civilisational and psychological terms. The extremes of aestheticisation and reportage are negotiated by such stories that speak to the moment, counteracting the force of the past, while anticipating later effects and likely repetitions. Such self-reflexive stories contest the regime of melancholic recollection, allowing for the possibility of critical witnessing. Manto’s and Husain’s narratives may remind us of the ironic, brutally direct short stories written by the Polish writer Tadeusz Borowski about the experience of the death camps, some from the point of view of the kapos who escorted Jewish prisoners to the gas chambers. These bleak accounts revealed the tragic extent of erosion of selfhood under the Nazi regime as well as the extent of compromise with oppression in the grey zone. Such facing up to memories of pain and suffering as well as of the normalisation of extreme violence as a seemingly acceptable aspect of everyday experience (the ‘zones of irresponsibility’) may be an important step towards recognition of the damage done during the moral catastrophe of the partition as well, leading to time being able to do its work, and an orientation towards a different future.

129 For a discussion of similar problems with respect to writing on the Holocaust, see LaCapra, History and Memory, pp. 180–181. In LaCapra’s view, a certain degree of acting out may be inevitable before the possibility of working through a traumatic series of events is achieved. See LaCapra, Representing the Holocaust, pp. 220–221. One may note this pattern in the case of Rosa Lublin, the protagonist of Cynthia Ozick’s The Shawl, who obsessively clings on to the shawl that is the sole memento of the daughter killed in the concentration camps, years later in America.

Chapter 6

Reinventing Testimonial Fiction in the Wake of the Partition

As we have seen, collective violence during the partition was of an unprecedented magnitude, approaching genocidal levels of intensity in certain regions. Furthermore, there was a qualitative transformation in the nature of violence in comparison to previous episodes of communal rioting. This was especially the case with respect to the targeting of women, but also in relation to new forms of reciprocal violence, including ethnic cleansing. This posed specific problems, both in terms of remembrance and representation. The processes leading up to the partition and the fiendish violence that took place between 1946 and 1948 had both a direct and a more elusive impact on the Indo-Islamic cultural amalgam that had developed over centuries and the civilisational forms of memory that preserved this. These were manifested in often belated effects on individual and collective consciousness and in the form of post-memory (a memory of trauma transmitted to the next generation). This study has sought to map the differentiated effects of partition violence through an analysis of literary representations for, as we have seen, literary images can often give a sharper sense of the shifting contours of historical trauma. Forms of testimonial fiction, I have sought to show, often evolved a double mode of address, speaking to past and present while engaging in a responsible way with memories of the moral catastrophe of the partition, even as lesser modes of fictional representation succumbed to the pressures of dominant ideologies, identitarian tendencies or the temptation to aestheticise suffering.

In the initial phase, the ethical imperative of coming to terms with the suffering of the victims leading up to their eventual rehabilitation and reintegration in society was ostensibly a priority for the two nation–states. However, the introduction of permit–systems at an early stage (1948) and later, passports, are illustrations of the perceived need to curtail and control the inflow of refugees, leading to endless travails for divided Muslim families in particular.
This agenda was further complicated by the blurring of boundaries between victim and perpetrator, especially in the case of those moving from a region in which they belonged to the minority to a region in which they represented the majority. For many victim-turned-perpetrators, there was not only the certainty of never being able to return to their homes, but also the near-impossibility of recovering a sense of untrammeled temporal flows after a journey through uncharted moral terrain (the grey zone). The need to own up to wrongdoing and acknowledge the culpability of the different communities subsequently came to the fore. This necessity became more pronounced with the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and continued sectarian conflict in Pakistan and Bangladesh in the 1980s and 90s. There was a further recognition that the remainder of historical trauma has not dissipated in South Asia. The circulation of disembodied forms of trauma and phantasmal modes of apprehending the past hints at spectral manifestations of unclaimed experience that continue to haunt the contemporary.

In Chapter Two which focused on novels of the 1940s and 50s, we saw how events during the prehistory of the partition led to a turn to local and regional contexts, as if to recover memory of ways of life perceived as under threat. Critical nostalgia for a way of life perceived to be disintegrating and an acute sense of loss depicted in Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) in some respects prefigure the structures of feeling that appeared in partition fiction. Mumtaz Shah Nawaz’s political novel about the impact of the Pakistan movement on the Muslim community *The Heart Divided* (1948, pub. 1957) reveals tragic contradictions within Muslim families participating in the Pakistan movement. However, the realist closure attempted in the novel and recourse to a ‘politics of mention’ mars the narrative’s negotiation with the traumatic memory of division. Early novelistic responses to the partition catastrophe, Khadija Mastur’s novel *Aangan* (1952 trans. *Inner Courtyard* 2000), *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khushwant Singh and *The Dark Dancer* (1958) by B. Rajan indicate the range of possible responses to extensive dislocation at the time. Mastur’s novel interrogates the optimism and euphoria that characterised nationalist assertion in Pakistan in its Progressive retelling of the story of mohajir families. Singh and Rajan, Indian novelists writing in English belonging to the first generation after the partition, attempt a documentary-style description and invoke mythic frameworks to

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1 Zamindar, *The Long Partition*, pp. 79–157
explain the violence. There is, however, a tendency towards clichéd descriptions of violence and a reliance on stereotypes and banal resolutions in these novels. These early novels are marked by the effects of historical trauma, but often fall back on nationalist frames of reference or received modes of understanding and anti-communalist rhetoric when faced with the enormity of the event. It is as if the possibility of creating a testimonial form through which the memories of horror could be self-consciously negotiated eludes these novelists.

After the immediate outpour of raw narratives after the partition, writers sought to recover civilisational memories of the Indo-Islamic cultural amalgam, including the idea of braiding sacred time and the quotidian across community boundaries. I argued in Chapter Three that novels from the 1960s and 70s reveal a greater degree of layeredness as modes of ‘fictive’ testimony. In this period, the next generation of writers began to work through traumatic memories of the partition either based on childhood experiences or those transmitted to them at one remove. These novels interweave micro-narratives of the inner realm of the self or the household with public events and processes leading up to the partition in order to cast a different light on the event. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hosain ends with a retrospective account of the fragmentation of Muslim families in Oudh as a result of the partition, also stressing the fading memory of dialogic forms and popular modes of exchange that had allowed for an augmentation of collective memory. *Udas Naslein* (1963 trans. *The Weary Generations* 1999) by Abdullah Hussein reaches back to the nineteenth century, tracking growing fissures in society as well as in personal relationships right up to the moment of the partition, interrogating in the process the very idea of heroism.

The memory of the crisis of 1947 was triggered in some instances by the persistence of communal and sectarian strife in independent India and Pakistan. *Tamas* (1974 trans. 2001) by Bhisham Sahni deploys types to an extent, yet achieves a critical account of uncanny manifestations of violence of near-genocidal intensity. Intizar Husain’s *Basti* (1979 trans. 1999), an allegorical meditation on separation, loss and exile, reflects upon the devastation to Pakistani society during 1971 as well as memories of migration after the violence during the partition. Rahi Masoom Raza’s *Adha Gaon* (1966 trans. *The Feuding Families of Village Gangaulli/Half a Village* 1994) articulates the predicament of Muslims in rural India,
unconvinced by the propagandists of the proponents of the Pakistan movement, also depicting the effects of communal violence on multiple and coexisting modes of temporality. Raza’s Topi Shukla (1968 trans. 2005) evokes the vulnerability of those who desire to live in in-between spaces; his Hindu protagonist becomes the victim of communal and language politics. Such significant novels reflect in critical ways on the fragility of civilisational values as they seek to retrieve the memory of modes of intercommunity dialogue. Some of these novels carry further the exploration of the breakdown of communication during the partition. However, we may also note the continuation of lesser modes of writing that replicate stereotypes and clichés, at times in more sophisticated ways in recent writing. The prevalence of masculinist anxieties and sexual stereotypes in The Distant Drum (1960) and A Bend in the Ganges (1964) by Manohar Malgonkar and Azadi (1975) by Chaman Nahal indicate the difficulty of freeing the imagination from the traps of dominant ideologies of nationalism and/or communalism/sectarianism.

As we saw in Chapter Four, writings from the 1980s and 90s look back to the dilemmas of 1947 with an awareness of the recurrence of the nightmares of communal violence even after fifty years, as well as of further erasure of civilisational memories. Two novels in particular exemplify the shift in emphasis from histories of grand events and important personages to ‘little’ histories of inner lives, often of people and/or communities on the margins of history. Anita Desai’s Clear Light of Day (1980) negotiates with sensitivity the residue of unclaimed individual and community experience in the wake of traumatic violence during the partition, manifested in delayed and displaced effects. A novelistic meditation on memory and desire, Krishna Baldev Vaid’s Guzara Hua Zamana (1981 trans. The Broken Mirror 1994) refracts the partition trauma through protagonist Beero’s consciousness and deftly revealed the cracks in Punjabi society prior to 1947. Such ‘fictive’ testimonies may be contrasted to a strand of writing that appeared in the 1980s, drawing on models derived from Holocaust literature or foregrounding ethnic, regional or minority identity with problematic results. While witnessing often takes place in the realm of the everyday, in its belated manifestation it has been susceptible to the influences of selective memorialisation as well as mediatisation of both religiosity and communal violence in recent times. Fictional representations continued to be vulnerable to ideological
appropriation in the name of community or nation. Nationalist and communal/sectarian frameworks of understanding with a high degree of emotionalism underpinning them contributed to amnesia about the event or one-sided reconstructions. Identitarian fic-tions threatened to relegate witnessing to an exclusivist space, lead-ing to the emergence of a victim culture. A discussion of problems in relation to the turn in partition historiography to survivors’ accounts and memory work underlines the need for an ethic of remembrance.

Novels such as Bapsi Sidhwa’s Ice Candy Man (1988) and diasporic writer Shauna Singh Baldwin’s What the Body Remembers (1999) are predicated to a large extent on narrow definitions of identity, verging on solipsism at times. Such identitarian reconstructions of the past in fictional form stand in contrast with a Punjabi novel published earlier, Kartar Singh Duggal’s Nahun Tē Maaś (1951 trans. Twice Born Twice Dead 1979). As we have seen, Joginder Paul’s Khwabraū (1990 trans. Sleepwalkers 1998) sensitively depicts the situation of mohajirs from Lucknow in Karachi (the ‘other’ refugee community) who held on to their way of life, as if living in frozen time. Kamila Shamsie’s Salt and Saffron (2000) and Kartography (2002), as well as Sorayya Khan’s Noor (2003) are products of a third generation perspective with a further level of self-consciousness about the effects of post-memory.

While the horror of collective barbarism does appear in refracted form in the first generation of writers, especially in Manto’s stories, there was an early awareness of the perils of uncritical claims to testimonial status. In Chapter Five I argued that Amrita Pritam’s long short story/novella ‘Pinjar’ (trans. ‘The Skeleton’) in particular engages with experiences of shame and bodily revulsion otherwise consigned to the realm of the inarticulate, as well as the possibility of transformation of the wounded self. Short stories including a further element of self-reflexivity allow for the possibility of self-critique through modes of critical witnessing, as in the case of Manto’s and Husain’s best work. Furthermore, important short stories by Manto and Husain problematise the very act of bearing witness.

The novels and short stories about the partition negotiate traumatic memories of often ambivalent experiences of loss and dislocation across three generations in distinctive ways. As I have argued, the more expansive mode of the novel often risked descending into banality and cliché while describing partition violence. The short story too could fall into this trap, despite attempts by the Progressive writers to make the form into a vehicle of social critique. In its spare or poetic treatment of the violence, self-conscious short fiction engaged with the dilemmas mentioned above, as did significant novels. In the absence of adequate public testimony as regards the suffering engendered by partition violence, such writing became a mode through which apparatuses of power, as well as societal and community-based assumptions that disallowed the possibility of listening to survivor voices with care, could be critically interrogated.

Furthermore, the need for such recognition of the limits to ‘fictive’ testimony became even more apparent, given the culture of complicity and impunity that developed in the states of India and Pakistan in relation to recent episodes of communal/sectarian violence. W. G. Sebald has reminded us, with reference to German writing about the Holocaust, of the perils of constructing aesthetic or pseudo-aesthetic effects from the ruins of an annihilated world. Partition writings that wallow in shallow nostalgia, or which create ersatz memories of the past through romanticised renditions of pre-partition harmony, are equally problematic. The stance of the proxy witness in Levi’s sense may nevertheless be discerned in significant writing on the partition and its afterlife, especially in stories by Manto and Husain. The necessity of speaking on behalf of those who had been silenced, whether the dead and the insane, or the stigmatised women (including those who might belong to a different community) is acknowledged here, amidst the ruins of language. There is also a degree of self-consciousness here as regards the fragility of such attempts to bear witness on behalf of the survivors.

In a recent Hindi novel by Kamleshwar a mutation of form has taken place, as a short story on the afterlife of the partition became the basis for a novel, even as the scope of the text widened to encompass other historical processes and partitions. His short

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story ‘Kitne Pakistan’ (trans. ‘How Many Pakistans?’) is a minor classic of partition literature, as we have seen in Chapter Five. His Hindi novel of 2001 bearing the same title (trans. Partitions 2005) expands on some of the themes earlier explored in the story, as a reflection on multiple partitions through history. The motif of cross-border romance that becomes a metaphor for geopolitical desire runs through the novel, while images of dismemberment and dislocation are pervasive, as in the case of the short story. The unnamed adeeb or writer who summons to the court of literature various figures from human history accused of practicing the politics of hatred casts his net wide and far. Characters from epics such as the Gilgamesh and the Mahabharata, as well as from the pages of history such as Babur, Aurangzeb, Hitler, Mountbatten and Jinnah appear in this court and tell their stories. Various figures responsible for the creation of many ‘Pakistans’ in the past and present are cross-questioned by the writer figure. They are deemed to be accountable for their actions, which has resulted in suffering for countless victims and refugees through history. Time and history appear in the court as personifications, expressing shame at the depravity that mankind has been capable of through the ages.

The risk of the over-extension of metaphor was already present in the earlier story; if ‘Pakistans’ are indeed the result of an absence of mutual fellow feeling leading to hatred, as the narrator of ‘Kitne Pakistan’ believes, the ‘partition-effect’ may certainly continue to be manifested. However, a certain economy of affect held together the fragmentary episodes in the original story, marked by the refrain as lamentation, ‘Kitne Pakistan’. Instead, the attempt in the novel to achieve a metaphoric criticism of such gaps in communication between individuals and communities, while reaching back into the realm of mythology and prehistory, leads to the idea of multiple partitions through time becoming somewhat repetitive. The poignancy of the poetic refrain in the story is lost here as the commentator rather than adeeb often comes to the fore to denounce excesses by culpable villains of history. This may partly be on account of the dilation and expansiveness of novelistic form, leading to a certain banality in the rendering of encounters between the protagonist and historical personalities. However, the major difficulty is with respect to the question of devising a literary form through which testimony itself may be reinvented for a contemporary readership. The format of the courtroom trial presided over by the writer as the conscience-keeper of society, while
interesting to begin with, is difficult to sustain in a full-length novel. Also, the narrator does not turn the conceptual lens of witnessing within, or explore the limitations of creative writing in making an adequate intervention in the absence of the prospect of justice, even as relentless pressure continues to be exerted on writers by informal and formal modes of censorship in the present day.

The adee refers to the work of fellow writers, including Manto and Rahi Masoom Raza (whose novel *Adha Gaon* is quoted in this narrative), to the extent of summoning writers Joginder Paul and Krishna Sobti to provide evidence in the court.\(^5\) However, such invocations seem to shift attention away from the problem of bearing witness to historical trauma, instead magnifying the importance of the writer’s role. The narrative takes on a stagy quality as these writer–figures intervene in the ‘trial’ underway. The sudden intrusion of stories of myriad victims of catastrophes, past and present, without sufficiently detailed description, risks contributing ultimately to a sense of indifference.\(^6\) The contention that there are forms of partition everywhere and that such ‘Pakistans’ are equivalent to hatred leads to a loss of specificity and texture in particular contexts invoked here, whether 1947 or Bosnia in the 1990s.

Perhaps the most moving sections of this novel appear in the form of a transgressive romance, partly set in Mauritius, between Vidya/Pari/Parveen (a woman who suffers physical violence during

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\(^5\) Ibid., p. 219.

\(^6\) On the idea of an aesthetic of ‘indifference’ as the dominant aesthetic of our time, relying on the presentation of violence as apocalyptic spectacle, and the resistance to it as either sentimental, or pathetic and absurd, see the earlier cited essay by Ghosh, ‘The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi’, pp. 48–50. Ghosh draws here on formulations by the Bosnian writer Dzevad Karahasan. One may further speculate as regards the exhaustion of the novel form as a mode of testimony, a tendency paralleling the possible exhaustion of the use of witness accounts and memory based historical accounts in the domain of partition historiography. I extend here an idea formulated by Mushirul Hasan, who argues that an element of repetition marks recent historical research based on oral accounts that tends to discover more and more atrocities, without really further amplifying the historiographical insights of earlier scholars such as Butalia and Menon and Bhasin. M. Hasan, keynote address at a ‘Workshop on Partition Narratives’ held at Jamia Millia Islamia, Jan 19, 2006.
the partition, then converts to Islam and moves to Pakistan) and the adeeb.\(^7\) If this thread had been strengthened, the interweaving of the personal and historical motifs of ‘partitions’ might have been more effective, as we have noted in the case of Intizar Husain’s novel \textit{Basti}. Kamleshwar’s interest in the inner lives of historical characters, as he puts it in a recent interview with Alok Bhalla, does lead to an exploration of several interesting bylanes of the past.\(^8\) Although he does achieve an unconventional take on historical figures such as Dara Shikoh (whose interest in Sufism is sensitively depicted) and Aurangzeb, the courtroom exchanges become somewhat predictable towards the end.\(^9\) For example, at the conclusion, scientists such as Oppenheimer and Edward Teller (rather than Taylor, as misspelt in the English translation) are held accountable for the nuclear explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.\(^10\) The lack of detail with respect to the stories of these nuclear physicists and the important differences between them takes away from the interest of such allusions to atrocities in the past.\(^11\) At this point in the narrative, personifying Hiroshima and Nagasaki as witnesses denouncing the evils of atomic science does not really amplify the sense of moral gravity. Such passages in which effects of historical trauma are described rather than evoked seem overwrought. Even so, the novel makes a significant statement in its moving conclusion, in which Kabir makes an

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\(^7\) Kamleshwar, \textit{Partitions}, especially pp. 331–42.


\(^9\) Kamleshwar, \textit{Partitions}, pp. 198–244.

\(^10\) Ibid., pp. 347–52.

\(^11\) Teller, so-called ‘father’ and promoter of the hydrogen bomb (who was one of the models for Dr Strangelove in Stanley Kubrick’s film \textit{Dr Strangelove or How I Learned to Love the Bomb}) fell out with Oppenheimer, testifying against him when his loyalty to the US was questioned. Powers provides an incisive account of the rift within the American scientific community with respect to the ethics of nuclear science. For example, Oppenheimer was afflicted by tremendous self-doubt after the explosion of the hydrogen bomb. This rift and the suspicion as regards Oppenheimer’s patriotism culminated in security charges being brought against him by the Atomic Energy Commission. See Thomas Powers, ‘An American Tragedy’. \textit{The New York Review of Books} LII, 14 (Sept 22, 2005): 73–79.
impassioned plea to give up nuclear arsenals and demilitarise our consciousness. The novel thus prompts one to reflect once again on the question: who indeed will stand witness on behalf the witnesses? A further self-consciousness as regards the activity of literary witnessing might have ensured that the dangers of prolixity and metaphorical over-extension were avoided, especially in the use of the universalised metaphor of ‘partitions’. A greater degree of self-reflexivity can lead to intensive self-scrutiny, as well as an acknowledgement of the limits to ‘fictive’ testimony as a mode of intervention in time. Exemplary instances of testimonial fiction, as we have seen, articulate the unspeakable, while retaining a mooring in locality and region. Such writings bear critical witness to insidious effects of partition violence, such as the radical dislocation of notions of temporal continuity and moral/ethical assumptions transmitted through civilisational memory.

We may note a recurrence of problems analysed in Chapter Four in the case of Kamila Shamsie’s recent novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009). This novel does not confine its scope to the partition era; however, an early section takes a brief imaginative detour through the experience of Delhi Muslims during the partition violence. While the protagonist Sajjad’s preoccupation with the depiction of the fading away of Muslim culture in Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* (which he reads in this novel) is interesting, the narrative, like some recent partition writings previously discussed, subsequently takes an identitarian turn. The novel exclusively focuses on the suffering of Delhi Muslims (including the declaration of Muslim properties as ‘evacuee’ property) and Muslims in the Punjab, with hardly any reference to the plight of refugees from other communities pouring into the city. Furthermore, the tendency to somewhat uncritically conflate the effects of different experiences of loss and trauma again becomes visible in this narrative about Hiroko, a *hibakusha* (Japanese survivor of the atomic explosions) from Nagasaki who falls in love with Sajjad, a Delhi Muslim who teaches her Urdu during the partition year, and whose son (born in Karachi, where they are forced to migrate) later gets drawn into post-9/11 geopolitical dynamics as a suspected Islamist terrorist.

14 Ibid., pp. 161, 87.
Sajjad and Hiroko are described as sharing a sense of commonality as survivors, for whom love has a redeeming and transformative value; Harry, an American CIA agent who is a family friend, says at one point, ‘Partition and the bomb. The two of you are proof that humans can overcome everything.’ Hiroko admittedly qualifies this with her response, ‘Sometimes I look at my son and think perhaps the less we have to “overcome” the more we feel aggrieved’; this hints at the pronounced victim culture that may emerge in subsequent generations as a result of vicarious experience of suffering.\(^\text{15}\)

The absence of any sensitive acknowledgment of the (at times problematic) struggle to cope as well as reclaim a lost sense of self of survivors from other communities and their descendants, however, renders *Burnt Shadows* flawed as a novel that revisits traumatic memories of extreme events in an at times somewhat staid realist mode. In her earlier novel *Salt and Saffron* Shamsie was ably captured the ambiguous legacy of the partition for divided Muslim families in terms of the metaphor of the continuing rift between the Pakistani and Indian branches of a Muslim family. While revisiting the partition experience here, her imagining does not stretch to encompass the different trajectory of the ‘other’ migrants in Delhi, where the early action unfolds, a significant gap in the narrativisation of the event despite the inclusion of references to the afterlife of the atom bomb explosion in Nagasaki in the narrative’s ambit, and the concern articulated about the grim prospect of an Indo–Pak nuclear exchange.

Amongst recent works negotiating the afterlife of the partition, the writing of the Pakistani poet Fahmida Riaz occupies a distinctive niche.\(^\text{16}\) Two prose narratives by Riaz that combine fiction,
reportage, memoir and travelogue encompass the ethical imperative to bear unflinching witness to the effects of continuing political violence across South Asia.\(^{17}\) *Zinda Bahar Lane* (1990 trans. 2000) and *Karachi* (1996 trans. *Reflections in a Cracked Mirror* 2001) also express a very personal anguish in poetic form. The two narratives are part of a trilogy about political violence, the first dealing with a visit to Dhaka by a character named Fahmida.\(^{18}\) The narrator grapples with the aftermath of 1971 through dialogues with Bengali intellectuals, as well as during a visit to the camps where Urdu-speaking migrants continue to live in internal exile, still awaiting the fulfilment of the promise to transport them to Pakistan. At one point she visits a colony called Mohakali, which reminds her of Noakhali where the second instance of major riots had taken place during the partition.\(^{19}\) An Indian woman named Sushila Devi, who lived in Gandhiji’s ashram as well as worked for the Communist party, had earlier shared with Fahmida a strange experience about the first major riots in Calcutta, which were pre-planned.\(^{20}\) During these riots, expert killers were called in, given the intense bloodletting that had been planned. Sushila Devi met one of them, a Pathan. After a round of stabbing, his body became so overheated that he had to be placed on slabs of ice to cool down.\(^{21}\) This memory based on a dialogue with a former activist in the form of a vignette is not elaborated upon, but acquires significance in the light of the narrative’s later reference to atrocities by the Pakistani army in 1971, as well as collective violence against Urdu-speaking migrants in Bangladesh. As a metaphor for the body politic, the image of the


\(^{18}\) The second volume in the trilogy, *Godavari* (1992), explores political violence along communal and caste lines in India. This has not yet been translated into English.

\(^{19}\) Riaz, *Zinda Bahar Lane*, pp. 22–23.

\(^{20}\) Pyarelal’s account of Gandhi’s last days confirms that Sushila Devi was given major responsibilities; Gandhi assigned her to work at the Wah refugee camp after his visit to Kashmir in August 1947. See Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi*, pp. 387–95.

\(^{21}\) Riaz, *Zinda Bahar Lane*, p. 23.
Witnessing Partition

Pathan’s overheated body brilliantly illustrates the perils of instrumental uses of orchestrated violence in contemporary South Asia.

The narrator also takes on board the half-truths and consolatory rhetoric that prevent reconciliation for the Urdu-speaking minority in Bangladesh (the ‘stranded Pakistanis’, as they came to be known). She meets a boy who claims that both his father and grandfather had died for Pakistan and repeats melodramatic lines stating his own intention to die with ‘Pakistan’ on his lips. The aspiration of hiring a ship and sailing to Karachi remains alive for many in this community, destined to remain unfulfilled given the problematic situation in Pakistan vis-à-vis the mohajirs. In a moment of fatigue Fahmida has a dream in which India and Pakistan are confused. She sees a land in which there are no rocks, in which there is only earth and water. The narrator sees the flowing lines of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh joining together and making a complete picture, running into each other like watercolours. The image of “Triveni” (the meeting point of three sacred rivers, a holy place for Hindus) comes to mind as she falls to sleep. This passage suggests a deep-rooted longing for reunion with the ‘Ganga–Jamni’ cultural amalgam and mode of civilisational being of the pre-partition era. The narrative ends with a reflection on the possibility of an Urdu magazine being published in Bengal and on the poetic associations of the term Zinda Bahar, or eternal spring, for Bengalis. This articulation of intense desire in poetic form follows her forthright attempt to come to terms with the legacy of political violence. The narrative also unsparingly unmasksp modes of self-deception that often characterise nationalist as well as communal/sectarian constructions of the past and present.

22 Ibid., p. 62. Papiya Ghosh has sensitively documented the predicament of the community of Urdu speakers, often referred to as ‘Biharis’, who were not allowed to migrate to Pakistan after the 1971 war of independence despite assurances to this effect by the Pakistani government earlier in return for their support of the cause of united Pakistan. See Ghosh, Partition and the South Asian Diaspora, pp. 57–90. Her discussion of political gamesmanship pertaining to the mohajir community in Pakistan, leading to the creation of the MQM (the Mohajir (now Muttahida) Qaumi Movement), is of interest as well. See Ghosh, Partition and the South Asian Diaspora, pp. 91–122.

23 Riaz, Zinda Behar Lane, p. 108.

24 Ibid., pp.157–58.
Reflections in a Cracked Mirror (trans. from the Urdu Karachi), the third volume in the trilogy, deals with the experience of living in Karachi, a city ravaged by sectarian strife, and recounts stories of both mohajir and Sindhi victims of violence. The narrator recollects drastic changes at the time of the partition, when plunder of deserted houses of refugees was commonplace and these houses were occupied by mohajirs. Such memories are interspersed with keen observations as regards post-partition history and the phenomenal growth of the city. The narrator traces the roots of sectarian/ethnic strife in Karachi and the growing gulf between Sindhi, mohajir and Punjabi in the form of an interior monologue and a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor. She bears courageous witness to an extreme situation in which rival armies belonging to political/sectarian organisations abduct and torture those from the ‘other’ community, without any likelihood of eventual punishment. Once again, the emergence of a culture of impunity and complicity is arraigned, with an awareness of the failures of the Pakistani nationalist project and its assumption of a unified, religion-based identity. In both narratives, the alternation between

25 For an early account of the different manifestations of violence in Sindh, which began later than the killings in Punjab, as well as Gandhi’s response to this in the months after the partition, see Pyarelal, Mahatma Gandhi, pp. 474–76. An extended discussion of the predicament of Sindhi refugees in Gujarat, also detailing the prehistory to their migration after the partition appears in Kothari, The Burden of Refuge: The Sindhi Hindus of Gujarat, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2007, especially pp. 45–111. Shashi Joshi’s short story ‘Independence Day’ (1997) addresses the situation of Sindhi refugees who migrated to South India during the partition. The narrator recounts her experience as a child of witnessing the arrival of such traumatised survivors, for whom the Independence Day celebrations at her school, where she is to perform the role of Bharat Mata, have little meaning. Instead, traumatic memories come to the fore, as a Sindhi mother laments the loss of her daughter, subjected to extreme violence before her death. The narrator reflects at one point that memories are not records, and that they refuse to remain within covers. Indeed, they may spring out at you at any time (see Shashi Deshpande, ‘Independence Day’ in Collected Stories, vol. 1, New Delhi: Penguin, 2003, pp. 121–31).


27 Ibid., pp.121–23.
first and third person modes, between responsible intellectual engagement and personalised description and occasional reflection on the legacy of partition and its afterlife, indicates the further evolution of the mode of ‘fictive’ testimony. This reinvented mode in Riaz’s narratives draws on prior forms such as the story, travelogue and memoir, yet is distinctive in its refusal to compromise with tendencies towards aestheticisation. These texts may indicate a new direction for testimonial fiction as a mode of representation that looks back to the partition experience, yet remaining focused on the contemporary, with an acute critical awareness of the fragility of the future to come.

Writers have striven in different ways to reckon with the historical trauma of the partition and its afterlife across three generations, as we have seen. The novelistic modes of representing the differentiated impact of historical trauma when analysed in context give a sense of the changing contours of individual and collective remembrance. In the finest short stories about the partition, on the other hand, we find a mode of representation marked by self-irony and consciousness about the fragility of the form. There is an acknowledgement here of the impossibility of witnessing all that has transpired, yet the imperative to bear witness, even if proxy witness, to extreme suffering and the unprecedented descent into depravity, as well as less discernible aftereffects in society and culture and on the mind. Such ‘fictive’ testimonies continue to provide models for later reflections on partition violence and the further reinscriptions of horror that have followed in the years after the event across South Asia, in the absence of any prospect of conclusive laying to rest of ghosts of the past. Indeed, as this study has sought to demonstrate, the form of testimonial fiction itself has acquired a new poignancy and at times ironic edge and meta-awareness as a consequence of the perceived and continuing need to create an imaginative cartography in which the possibility of (at least) transitional justice may be realised in South Asian spaces.
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Novels


**Short Stories**


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Index

aanchlik 149
Aangan by Khadija Mastur 64, 90, 295
The Accident by Elie Wiesel 187
Adha Gaon by Rahi Masoom Raza 121, 145, 296, 301
afsana 240
‘afterlife’ 9
ahimsa 157, 162
Ahmad, Aijaz 90, 116
Ahrars 87
ajlaf 70
Akal Fauj 96
Akhand Path 227
alam 290
Ali, Ahmed 66, 68, 73, 194
‘alien’ culture 197
All-India Muslim League 15, 122, 146; and ‘coalition party’ 227; consolidation of 81; demand for Pakistan 18, 20; ‘extra-constitutionalist’ action of 21; formation of 19; group identity on basis of religion 93; ideology of class division 87; influence during riots of 1946–7 227; influence of 80; ‘parallel’ nationalism of 85; as people-based party 85; propagation of communal hatred 84; rivalry with Congress 270; Wardha scheme and 82
All Pakistan Progressive Writers Association 89
‘Amritsar Aa Gaya He’ by Bhisham Sahni 46
Anjuman-I-Himayat Urdu 83
anti-Muslim pogrom 245
anti-Muslim violence 6
anti-Sikh massacres 17
anti-Sikh pogrom 9, 27, 117, 209, 245
anti-Sikh riots 28
Arya Samaj 19, 102, 204, 226, 261
ashraf 64, 76, 89
ashraf society 194
Austerlitz by W.G. Sebald 188
Awadh taluqdars 133
ayah 218
Azadi by Chaman Nahal 121, 164, 297
Azadi ke Saaye Mein by Ebadat Barelvi 74
‘badmash’ 100
‘banality of evil’ 49, 186
‘Banished’ by Jamila Hashmi 261, 262
Basic Education scheme 82
Basti by Intizar Husain 7, 166, 168, 169, 175, 176, 296, 302
‘bastis’ 169
Baumgartner’s Bombay by Anita Desai 191
A Bend in the Ganges by Manohar Malgonkar 121, 161, 297
Bhasha and Sanskrit Pracharini Sabhas 83
‘Bingo’ 237
Black Margins by Sa’adat Hasan Manto 252, 277
bodhi 289
Bombay riots 9, 245
The Bride’s Mirror by Nazir Ahmad 68
British imperial policy 19
British Raj 19, 71, 130
The Broken Mirror 29, 37, 185, 201
Burnt Shadows by Kamila Shamsie 60, 303, 304

Cabinet Mission Plan 21, 106
‘Calcutta killings’ 21, 191, 192
caravans 51
Caruth, Cathy 118
The Causes of the Indian Revolt by
Syed Ahmad Khan 66
Celan, Paul 38
‘The City of Sorrow’ by Intizar
Husain 291
Civil Disobedience movement 77
Clear Light of Day by Anita Desai
37, 185, 192, 297
Cleary, Joe 88
‘coalition party’ 227
colonial rule 13, 15, 88, 90, 277
communal conflicts 28, 93
‘communal politics’ 126, 150
communal rioting 104, 156, 159,
294
communal violence 5, 13, 14, 61,
62, 71, 121; effects of 297;
fuelled by Right-wing ideology
181; and mass slaughter 206; in
Rawalpindi 151–61
‘community’ welfare 253
‘complete witness’ 258, 285
‘composite culture’ 29
Congress–Muslim relationship 78
Cripps Mission 21, 84
‘cultural trauma’ 7

Dandi March 77
Dard-e-dils 236
The Dark Dancer by Balachandra
Rajan 64, 104, 111, 295
Defence of India rules 84
devi 261
Difficult Daughters by Manju Kapur
231
Dilli ki Bipta by Shahid Ahmad
Dehlavi 74

Direct Action Day 21, 191
The Distant Drum by Manohar
Malgonkar 121, 163, 297
‘documentary fiction’ 48, 185
‘Dream Images’ by Surendra
Prakash 288
The Drowned and the Saved by
Primo Levi 187

Eichmann in Jerusalem 186
Eichmann trial 186
The Emigrants by W.G. Sebald 188
‘emotionalism,’ nationalist 176, 177
ethnic cleansing during partition
6, 51, 159, see also Holocaust;
counter-violence and ration-
alisation of 163; in East and West
Punjab 180; expulsions during
213; genocidal violence and 179
eunuchs see hijras
Everything is Illuminated by Jonathan
Safran Foer 190

Fact Finding Organisation 24, 245,
247
‘Farangis’ 66, 67
Fateless by Imre Kertesz 187
The Feuding Families of Village
Gangauli/Half a Village 121,
145, 296
fictive testimony 46–60, 240, 244,
284, 292, 296, 297; limits to 299,
303; self-reflexive modes of 61
‘Filth’ by Amrit Rai 280
‘Final Solution’ 36, 45, 50, 186,
187, 215
‘The Final Wish’ by Badiuzzaman
270
Four Quartets by T.S. Eliot 200
freedom struggle 35
‘Frontier Gandhi’ 205

Gandhi, Mahatma, assassination
of 22
‘Ganga–Jamni’ cultural amalgam 6, 306
gender-based violence 101
genocidal violence 6, 180, 187, 192
Ghalib, Mirza 64, 263, 264
ghettos 60
Gilgamesh 300
Gita 111, 204
goondas 8
The Great Divide by W.V. Hodson 13
Great War 68
‘grey zone’ 46, 49, 63, 120, 188, 215, 285, 293
Gujarat violence 9
Guzra Hua Zamana by Krishna Baldev Vaid 29, 201, 297
Hamlet by William Shakespeare 208
Hardinge, Lord 67
The Heart Divided by Mumtaz Shah Nawaz 64, 75, 89, 134, 295
hegira 167
hibakusha 303
hijras 99
hijrat 167, 170
Hilberg, Raul 186
Hindi–Urdu language divide 150
Hindu communalists 197
Hindu Mahasabha 19, 77, 122, 150, 162
Hindu–Muslim divisions 14;
fraternity 123; parity 121;
relation, see also intercommunity relations: taboos associated with, 30, 79; riot 129; unity 77, 79; violence 106
Hindu nationalism 121; rise of 181
Hindu Right 6, 20, 47, 119, 160, 182, 280
‘Hindu stooges’ 80
Hindutva movement 54
‘His Heap of Rubble’ by Mohan Rakesh 268
historical trauma: concept of 62;
symptoms of 88
History and the Present 12
The Hollow Men by T. S. Eliot 134
Holocaust 187, 190, 191, 214; historical, psychological and sociological studies of 186; victims 37; violence after Eichmann trial 186
Home Rule agitation 71
hooligans 8, 100, 106
‘How Many Pakistanis?’ by Kamlashwar 273
Hunter Commission on Indian Education 82
Husain, Intizar 7, 47, 60, 61, 114, 289; Basti 120, 166, 296, 302; The City of Sorrow 291; A Letter from India 289; The Stairway 290; An Unwritten Epic 104, 248
Ice Candy Man by Bapsi Sidhwa 185, 218, 298
imam 290
imambara 290
India: communal tensions during pre-partition period in 29;
freedom struggle in 121; Hindu right in 6; historiography of nationalism in 121–27; modes of collective violence in 190;
multi-ethnic state with regional disparities 93; Nehruvian vision of 17; partition of (see partition of India); secular nationalism in 54
Indian Muslims 125, 132; problems faced by 236
Indian National Congress: as communal party 124; cooperation with Muslim League 122
Indo-Islamic cultural amalgam 170, 178, 250, 294, 296
Index

Indo–Pak border 287
intercommunity coexistence 18, 169; friendships 204; marriage 130; relations 61, 71, 130, 266, see also Hindu-Muslim relation

jagirdar 136
‘Jai Hind’ 26
Jalal, Ayesha 16, 18
Jallianwala Bagh massacre 138
Jamiyat al-ulama 87
jats 249
Jinnah, Muhammad Ali 14, 15, 106; role as ‘sole spokesman’ 122; role in partition of India 16, 18
jumhurnama 249

kafilas 51
‘Kali Raat’ by Aziz Ahmad 278, 279
Kalma 289
Karachi by Fahmida Riaz 60, 305
karma 99
Kartography by Kamila Shamsie 237
Khalistani movement 17, 71, 77
Khan, Aga 139
Khan, Khan Abdul Ghaffar 140
Khan, Sorayya 186
Khan, Syed Ahmad 19
Khilafat agitation 20
Khudai Khidmatgars 87, 88, 140, 156
‘Khuda ki Kasam’ by Sa’adat Hasan Manto 284
Khwabrau by Joginder Paul 186, 235, 298
Kitne Pakistan by Kamleshwar 60, 300
Krishak Praja Party 20

LaCapra, Dominick 62, 92, 96, 216
Lahore, communal violence in 216–25
Lahore convention 20

‘Lajwanti’ by Rajinder Singh Bedi 261
Lang, Berel 187
Language and Silence 187
language politics, in Punjab 82
‘A Letter from India’ by Intizar Husain 289
Levi, Primo 49, 63, 258, 299
Lifton, Robert J. 41
‘little Pakistan’ 17

Mahabharata 104, 107, 108, 167, 249, 300
Majlis-i-Istiqal-i-Pakistan 172
‘majority’ community 72
‘Malbe ka Malik’ by Mohan Rakesh 41
‘Mard-e-Momin’ 270, 271
‘marsiya’ 72
‘martyrdom’ 58, see also shahadat
‘martyrs’, 57, 58
Mehta, Deepak 14, 106
Mehta, Pratap Bhanu 121
Meo community 53
Midnight’s Children by Salman Rushdie 184
migration: after collective violence during partition 120; civilisational memory during 166–78; modes of transport used during 51; of Sikh and Hindu communities 96
minority community, rights of 15
‘minority’ languages, status of 83
mlechchas 153
mohajirs 60, 90, 168, 175, 176, 289, see also refugees; dreams or nightmares of 235–39; from Lucknow in Karachi 186; in Pakistan 52
Moharram 129, 146, 148, 176, 290
Momins 87
Morley–Minto reforms 19
‘mother India’ 162
Mountbatten, Lord 14, 15, 106
Muhammad, Prophet 167

*mujahid* 205

Muslim League see All-India Muslim League

Muslim League’s National Guard (MLNG), 20, 96, 158

*Nahun Te Maas* by Kartar Singh Duggal 232, 298

‘national honour’ 233

nationalist movement 76

‘nationalist Muslim’ 18, 80, 87, 91, 271

‘national realism’ 242, 250, 292

‘nation-building’ 7, 249

Nawaz, Shah 86

Nehru committee report 20, 78

Nehru, Jawahar Lal 106; role in partition of India 16; ‘tryst with destiny’ speech 100

Niederland, William 45

*Night* by Elie Wiesel 186

Nihal, Mir 67, 68, 71

Non-Cooperation movement 71

*Noor* by Sorayya Khan 238

Nuremberg trials 48, 49

Old Delhi, life after partition in 191–201

orchestrated violence, during partition 6

Orientalism 108

‘ornament of the home’ 68

*The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia 209

*The Painted Bird* by Jerzy Kosinski 187, 189, 224

Pakistan: historiography of nationalism in 121–27; as military-bureaucratic state 24; Mohajirs in 52; partition of, 235–39; as social reality 89–94

*The Pakistani Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa 218

‘Pakistani hordes’ 126

Pakistani Progressives 89

Pakistan movement 17, 54, 121, 134, 146, 173, 204, 270, 271, 295

‘Pali’ by Bhisham Sahni 266

Pandey, Gyanendra 17–18, 65, 121

Pant, Govind Ballabh 126

‘parallel’ nationalism, of Muslim League 85

partition massacres 13

partition of India: afterlife from 1960s and 70s 115; aspects of life during 25; causes of 13; collective memory of 54; counter-images to effects of dislocation and exile during 265–70; displacement of refugees during 1; ethics of remembrance pertaining to 41–46; ethnic cleansing during 6; histories of 11–22; and its discontents 103–14; life after 22–25; partitioning of consciousness during 287–93; plight of refugees during 3; psychological aftereffects of 191; recuperation of traumatic events during 239; role of Indian leadership in 16; short stories about 240; Sikh experiences of 231; testimonial fiction during 294; traumatic memory associated with 33–37, 244; trials for perpetrators of violence during 48; violence during 1, 25; antecedents of 29–33; witness accounts of 209–17

Patel, Sardar 126

permit-systems 294

perpetrator trauma 63

‘Peshawar Express’ by Krishan Chander 265
‘Pinjar’ by Amrita Pritam 27, 259, 260, 261, 298  
‘poetic license’ 221  
‘politics of mention’ 75–89  
Popular Front policy 241  
‘pornography of violence’ 7, 280  
post-traumatic stress disorder  
(PTSD) 36  
Prasad, Beni 123  
Progressive writers 119, 128, 144, 167, 273, 274  
PTSD see post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)  
Punjabi Muslim society 31  
Punjabi Suba movement 17

qissa-goi 148  
Quaid-e-Azam 204  
Quran 204

Radcliffe Award 107  
Radcliffe Commission 254  
Radcliffe, Cyril 21, 221  
Radcliffe line 21  
Ramayana 159, 262, 263  
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh see RSS  
Rawalpindi, communal violence in 151–61, 210, 229
razakars 256  
Raza, Rahi Masoom 117, 120  
The Reader by Bernhard Schlink 189  
1857 rebellion see rebellion of 1857  
rebellion of 1857 66  
Reflections in a Cracked Mirror 307  
refugees: displacement during partition 1  
plight of 3; treatment of post-partition 64  
Regarding the Pain of Others by Susan Sontag 41  
religious community-based politics 17

‘religious frenzy’ 253  
religious identity 19  
‘Revenge’ by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas 278  
riot victims: rehabilitation and  
reintegration in society 10, 294;  
traumatic symptoms in 36  
‘Roots’ by Ismat Chughtai 272  
Rowlatt Bill 67  
RSS 19, 96, 126, 158

sabha 153  
Sahni, Bhisham 25, 46, 117, 120, 151, 266, 296  
shahukars 260  
Saiyid 289  
Sakhi Sarwar cult 102  
Salt and Saffron by Kamila Shamsie 236, 298, 304  
salt satyagraha 140  
Saraswati, Dayanand 19  
satyagraha 256  
‘Savera group’ 90  
Schindler’s List by Thomas Keneally 189

‘screen memory;’ concept of 35, 36  
secondary trauma 63  
separatist violence 13, 129, see also  
Shia–Sunni violence  
self-defence squads, formation of 230  
‘self-sacrifice’ 156

‘semi-fascist’ Hindu organisations 84  
Seminar magazine 212, 215  
shahadat 58, see also ‘martyrdom’  
shahidi jathas 20
‘Shahid Saz’ story by Sa’adat Hasan Manto 56  
shahnama 249  
Shamsie, Kamila 186  
‘The Shepherd’ by Ashfaq Ahmad 289  
Shias 87, 175, 290
Shia–Sunni riots see Shia–Sunni violence
Shia–Sunni violence 129, 131
‘shuddhi’ 226
Sikh Akal Saina 20
Simon commission 139
Singh, Baldev 106
Siyah Hashye by Sa’adat Hasan Manto 251
Sleepwalkers 235
Sophie’s Choice by William Styron 187
‘So the Witnesses Stated’ by Fikr Taunsi 269
Soviet Writers Congress 241
‘The Stairway’ by Intizar Husain 290
state-sponsored violence 214
Stern Reckoning by G. D. Khosla 119, 245
‘Stony Hearted’ by Ashfaque Ahmad 261, 263
‘strategic rationalist’ 123
‘Subh-e-Azadi’ 90
Sunlight on a Broken Column by Attia Hosain 120, 127, 128, 134, 135, 296
survivors’ trauma 38
survivor testimony 46
‘Take Me Home’ by Bhisham Sahni 267
taluqdari system 128
Tamash by Bhisham Sahni 120, 151, 296
Tamash (film) 160
‘tamasha’ 220
tawaifs 69, 202
‘temporary madness’ 38, 106
‘terrorists’ 137, 197
testimony: fictive 46–60; modes of 37–41; survivor 46
‘The Thirst of Rivers’ by Joginder Paul 272
The Thousand and One Nights 171
time of partition’ 179, 238, see also
partition of India
The Tin Drum (Gunter Grass) 184
‘Toba Tek Singh’ 254, 277, 278, 282
Topi Shukla by Rahi Masoom Raza 121, 125, 149, 297
train massacres 94–103
Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh 64, 94, 97, 111, 295
trauma, see also historical trauma:
of dislocation 51; of partition 53; perpetrator 63; secondary 63
Trauma: Explorations in Memory by Cathy Caruth 36
Twilight in Delhi by Ahmed Ali 64, 65, 70, 71, 73, 89, 169, 196, 295, 303
Two Lives by Vikram Seth 191
two-nation theory’ 15, 26, 54, 87, 172
Udas Naslein by Abdullah Hussein 120, 135, 296
ulama 87
‘An Unwritten Epic’ by Intizar Husain 104, 248
Urdu: afsana 240; as ‘alien’ language 197; culture’s relationship with nation 242; speaking migrants 60
Ur-trauma 93
Uska Bachpan 201
Vedas 153
violence during partition: anti-Muslim 6; lives of children during 23; in Northwest Frontier Province 21; traumatic memory associated with 33–37; trials for perpetrators of 48; types of 6; against women 6
‘Wages Of Labour’ 252
Wardha scheme 82
The Weary Generations 120, 135, 144, 296
‘We Have Arrived in Amritsar’ by Bhisham Sahni 266
What the Body Remembers by Shauna Singh Baldwin 185, 226, 298
‘Where Is My Mother?’ by Krishna Sobti 276
Wiesel, Elie 38, 186, 187
witness, accounts of partition of India 209–17
Witnessing Partition 1
Zafar, Bahadur Shah 66
Zamindari Abolition Act 147
zamindari system 130, 133
zenana 131
Zinda Bahar Lane by Fahmida Riaz 60, 305
‘zones of irresponsibility’ 49