**General Topic- 2**

**Partition Literature : Significant Literary works on Partition**

Epoch-defining events like the French Revolution or the American Civil War have always inspired literature. The Partition of India in 1947 is no exception. The Partition divided India into two nation states for Muslims and Hindus: the Dominion of Pakistan and the Union of India. It was described by Lord Mountbatten as ‘one of the greatest administrative operations in history’.

Whilst the historical and historiographical works about partition have their own place and value, literature has a vital role to play in preserving events in collective memory, and interpreting the implications for posterity. Partition literature exists across all major literary forms: novels, short stories, poems and non-fiction.

One of the most famous novels is Train to Pakistan (1956) by **Khushwant Singh**, made into a movie by the same name in 1998 by **Pamela Rooks**. In the book, **Singh** focuses on local events in a fictional village called Mano Majra, to illustrate how even a relatively peaceful and secluded village, where Sikhs and Muslims have always lived as kin, was seared by the fire of communal violence that spread through India at that time. Singh brilliantly captures the moral confusion caused by an unprecedented event like partition.

**Bhisham Sahni**’s novel Tamas (Darkness, Ignorance 1974), is set in a small village in the North West frontier province (now in Pakistan), where the killing of a pig, considered impure by the Muslims, and a cow, considered holy by the Hindus, leads to communal riots. Ironically, once the carnage has run its course, the very people who were secretly behind the twin triggers, go around appealing for peace. **Govind Nihalani,** who made Tamas into a television film in 1987, described it as a “grim reminder of the immense tragedy that results whenever the religious sentiments of communities are manipulated to achieve political objectives. It is a prophetic warning against the use of religion as a weapon to gain and perpetuate political power.”

**Salman Rushdie’s** novel **Midnight’s Children** (1981), which won both the Booker Prize and the Booker of Booker Prize, spans a period beginning thirty two years before independence and ending thirty one years after it. It is based on the premise that children born on the midnight of 14th August 1947 were endowed with special magical powers. They could step through mirrors, multiply fish, turn into werewolves, change their size, transform gender, inflict wounds with words, eat metal, fly higher than a bird and so on. The midnight of Indian independence is represented through the refraction of the colors of the Indian flag onto national celebrations with “saffron rockets” and “green sparkling rain” and bodies of women giving birth: “green skinned”, “whites of eyes … shot with saffron”. The story is a loose allegory for events in India before and after partition, and has been called a novel of India’s coming of age.

Among short stories, ***Toba Tek Singh*** is perhaps the most famous. Written by **Saadat Hasan Manto**, it was published in 1955, the year of his death. By setting the story in a mental asylum in Lahore a couple of years after independence, Manto generates comedy and uncomfortable satire. After partition, the governments of India and Pakistan decide to exchange Muslim, Sikh and Hindu lunatics. One lunatic is so bewildered with all the talk about partition that he climbs up a tree and refuses to come down, saying “I don’t want to live in India and Pakistan. I’m going to make my home right here on this tree.” The insane mutterings of a Sikh inmate in a mix of Punjabi, Urdu and English, though nonsensical, clearly transmits disdain for the very idea of Pakistan and India, and the displacement it creates. The story ends with him dying in no-man’s land between the two countries.

While some poets wrote celebratory odes to independence, many considered it a false dawn. In Subh-e-Azadi (Freedom’s Dawn, 1947) Pakistani poet **Faiz Ahmad Faiz** laments the violence of partition saying “this is not that longed for break of day, Not that clear dawn in quest of which our comrades set out.”

The partition of India is much more than just a historical fact. It is a compelling literary theme that continues to inspire creative outpourings by writers. Perhaps this is both an attempt to process the tremendous trauma created by partition, and to bear witness to the forces of communalism, class divide and patriarchy behind the violent division, which continue to play out across the Indian subcontinent today.