SUMMARY

Flowing since the ages
In me
Is the wisdom
I have gained
Do not blotch it with
The intentions you have conveyed

Falling under the rubric of the Partition literature, the three surveyed texts, Quarratulain Hyder’s *River of Fire* (1998), Intizar Husain’s *Basti* (2007) and Tahmima Anam’s *A Golden Age* (2007) remarkably study various periods of the Indian history and the evolution of India as a nation. Nation, in the context of India, has been a cultural-historical-ethnic space that has, time and again, been visited, probed, and exploited by ethnicities and races from around the world. A historical construct, India has over the years assimilated much from other cultures and races. Immensely rich materialistically and culturally, India has, for centuries, been a fabled space for invaders. The geographical location of India further made it easy for the access of the foreigners. The texts studied during the research reflect the *Bharat desh, Al-Hind* and India as a cultural-social primordial entity that developed with time as a distinct, unique multi-cultural, multi-religious, social entity.

Tracing the historical, cultural, social character of early India, the three studied texts cover a span of millennia of India’s evolution as a multi-subjective identity till its disintegration into two new nations – Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively. A cultural construct *River of Fire* traces the fourth century India and the arrival of various races and ethnicities in the land of Aryans. The narrative effectively brings out the assimilation of various races and cultures that arrived in India only to mold her character into a heterogeneous entity. The narrative categorically traces the evolution of India as a cultural construct through customs,
traditions and mannerisms of the musicians and kings, painters, singers, dancers, religious leaders’ et al., as and when they arrived at various periods in the Indian history.

The dialogue, both at the cultural and historical levels, between various ethnicities, traces the various customs adopted and adapted by the indigenous people and the mleechas. With this remarkable narrative comes alive an India of various religions and cultures. The cultural synthesis leads to a co-existence that becomes a normal part of the lives of the characters. The text cites numerous examples (quoted in the Chapter I too) of the cultural synthesis of various religions and cultures. Woven around the factual and the mythical space, River of Fire remarkably brings out the concept of nation as a cultural construct. The movement from kingdoms of the Mauryan period to the arrival of Turks and Islam to the establishment of the British, the Partition of India in 1947 and the post-Partition, the narrative reflects incisively on the cultural-social synthesis of the times.

An epic River of Fire establishes India as a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-ethnic space, a theme much talked about in the other two novels too – Basti and A Golden Age. Envisaging nation as a utopian construct, the people of Basti remarkably reflect the peaceful indo-Islamic co-existence of the twentieth century. The Muslims and the Hindus live together without any religious rancor. The people of Basti are analogously attached to what scholars have termed as primordial attachment. The characters feel immensely connected to the nature and land of Roopnagar. Weaving his narrative around the age old style of story-telling, Intizar Husain creates a nation at the cultural-historical level, the fall of which leaves the characters of Basti shattered and disabled – both physically and mentally. It is the disconnect with their primordial land and ‘home’ that leaves the characters mystified and baffled.

Primordialism here plays an essential role in defining the character of Roopnagar and its people. It is rather the commonality of the primordial attachment
towards their village and cultural space that enables the characters to remain connected to each other, too. The attachment further is generational wherein Abba Jan and other elders of the society teach children to respect the land of their forefathers. A non-rational concept, the ethnic kinship is maintained without taking the religion or language into consideration. It is eventually at the time of fall of Bangladesh that memory, history and past play an important role. The fall of Bangladesh further contests the category of nation wherein the primordial attachment snaps, especially when the common man has to choose between staying or leaving the land of his forefathers, the mythical, fabled space in which he was born and raised. The banishment from ‘home’ remorsefully recalls the past and reminds the characters of their moral failure.

A new nation comes into existence once the links between the Hindus and the Muslims snap irretrievably. Fighting for such a cause are the people of A Golden Age. A Golden Age brings out the patriotism of the Bengali-Muslims who are the progenies of the age old cultural synthesis of Islam and Hinduism of Bengal. The narration remarkably opens the world of a Bengali-Muslim. The dual identity reflects the uniqueness with which the characters carry both the Hindu-Bengali-Muslim character. The categorization of a nation on the basis of a common language seems to fail here, as the characters are well-versed with both the languages. There is peaceful co-existence among the Bengali-Hindus. It is not until the masses are drawn into the politics of religious fanaticism that there arises the need to save their identity. Creating a history through more than two decades of struggle (the first spark of nationalism starting in 1959 with the language movement), the people of A Golden Age, too, explicitly reflect the primordial attachment both at the individual and at the national level. Citing facts from the history, the narrative brings out nationalism and the eventual establishment of Bangladesh as realization of a golden age.
The birth of nation/s discussed in the three surveyed texts effectively points out the cross-cultural dialogue of the three nations – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; among themselves and with the world at large. It is to be noticed that the two ‘horns’ of India have had a long social acculturation with each other and adapted and adopted each other’s customs and cultures. There is thus a commonality in the attitudes of the characters of the three texts that renders them into different kinds of ‘nation’. It is significant to mention here that despite their different cultural-literary backgrounds, the novelists do not waiver in bringing out one of the most important aspects of the Partition literature – the humane side and socio-cultural-political milieu. The characters in all the three novels go through a clash of identities (mostly cultural and generational), and cultures that eventually renders them into an ‘imaginary, painful’ haven. The three texts thus focus on the birth of nation as a cultural-historical construct that renders the religious implications meaningless.

The narrative traces the condition of the masses post-Partition wherein the characters are rendered into the abhorred and unwanted state of being of exile. The shock of living in a no-where wishful land leaves Kamal and Hari Shankar of the nineteenth century (River of Fire) shattered, Abba Jan (Basti) demoralized and hundreds of mohajirs/shoronarthis of the 1971 War baffled (A Golden Age). An effort is made at relocation of the characters that move between the polarities of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’. While Kamal and his group tries to revive ‘India’ in England through their avant garde ways, Zakir and his family (Basti) revive their ‘home’ through the collective memory of the past. Rehana (A Golden Age) recalls the smell of air and the seasonal songs while travelling through the North-East, reminiscing. Collectively, the characters in all the three texts reflect the demanding experience of creating a distinct socio-cultural space. During the process, however, the past is never forgotten and nor snipped; it lingers on in memory.

Memory in all the three texts plays the role of establishing a nation that is lost to the exiled. As a collective socio-national tool, memory creates a historical
space that was lost by the masses at large. Shared by the *mohajirs*, the memory provides them a secured social space (individually and collectively) in which past is shared and the loneliness eradicated. Few memories remain personal and integral providing the expatriates a hope, a link with the past. The pleasant memories of the times spent in the primordial land are referred to, and recalled, to soothe the pain of the present. It is the land of forefathers that gives the characters an identity that the people possess. Kamaluddin and Nirmala (*River of Fire*), Turab Ali, *Bi Ammi, Abba Jan*; Sabirah (*Basti*) and Rehana, Sohail and Maya (*A Golden Age*) remarkably cite the long-established primordial attachment with the land. Graves of the forefathers and old graveyards are missed and the delta of Bengal evoked. The texts cite numerous examples where the trees, fields, weather and a threshold reminds the characters of the land that they have left behind.

It is at this point that the question of ‘territoriality’ makes itself clear. The borders that have been drawn by the political leaders explicitly add to the miserable position of the deported. Remorsefully, the partitions have created borders that cannot be undone – both physical and mental. The boundaries and borders further emphasize the truth of being ‘uprooted’. The boundary further establishes that the ‘gates’ are once and for all closed and it is virtually impossible for an exile, refugee and uprooted to get back to his ‘home’. The meaning of ‘home’ is lost; as happened with Kamal (*River of Fire*) during his visit back to his Dehradun. The name plates remain the same while the residents change. There is no one to call his own and so the meaning of reviving the ‘home’ is lost. Zakir (*Basti*) too can only look at the far-out trees or the sky above and imagine the cool shade of the *neem* that they have left behind. The hundreds of *shoronarthis* from East Bengal are hopeless and consider it wise to leave their ‘home’. They are restricted and prohibited now.

The characters are left with no other choice but to frame for themselves a new set of socio-cultural locale. It is here that the ‘contested ethnicity’ comes into question. Forming the backbone of all the three texts, ethnicity reflects the
indigenous people and their identity. The three surveyed texts study in detail the ethnicities of various regions (Maurya, Islamic and British period in *River of Fire*, Indo-Islamic in *Basti* and Hindu-Bengali-Muslim in *A Golden Age*). It need not be reiterated that it was the clash of these very ethnicities that gave birth to the two new nations – Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Partition of the nation in 1947 changed the socio-cultural milieu permanently by establishing a discord between the Muslims and the Hindus. Amir Reza (*River of Fire*) and Salamat and Afzal (*Basti*) intensify the growing religious discord of the masses. Incidentally while *River of Fire* and *Basti* reflect the Partition of 1947 as a painful opus of memory, the dismemberment of Pakistan and the emergence of the new state of Bangladesh (*A Golden Age*) is celebrated.

Despite falling under the category of Partition literature, the three texts do not project the Partition/s or the process in a gory manner. The three novelists focus on the individual space as it relates to the national space. While there is remorse in *River of Fire* and *Basti* at the loss of socio-cultural-ethnic space, an effort is made to provide for the same in *A Golden Age*. *A Golden Age* focuses on the essential Bengali nationalism with the guerillas forming the background of the narration. The narrative of all the three texts substantiates the failure of multi-culturalism in the modern era. Probing the mythical and historical roots of the pluralistic complex cultural society Quarratulain Hyder and Intizar Husain try to establish a beautiful integrated culture that was lost to the political schisms.

It is experience of the author’s themselves that is reflected in their works. For Quarratulain Hyder, India becomes a River that has been flowing perennially, assimilating and gathering variants of a nation during its course. Intizar Husain’s stories are animated with the fall of man, the migration across the border into a new country, the fear and apprehension of losing all that Intizar Husain and his characters held valuable, and the consequent sense of loss and grief. For Tahmima Anam, clearly, it is to revive and give recognition to the people of 1971 War that she
returns back home. The experiences of the characters, in each and every way provide a glimpse of the love and respect they hold for their land and culture. The authors successfully provide the characters with the conjoined existence that supplies them with their cultural and historical identity.

The history is thus created both as memory and reality. The Partition/s irrefutably establish the factual history of how the cultural home is mapped out. Paradoxically, it is because of the Partition/s that the significance of ‘home’ gets acknowledged. Analogously, the memories create a true account of the experiences that are either shared or are buried forever. While an individual tries to establish the snapped past, the indigenous soil becomes alien to him. The nation at a personal level is thus lost forever. Since it is the volk that forms a nation, severance from the soil alternatively affects the being of a nation. A nation loses its character (varying from the historical constructs to the newly formed nations) the moment its ethnicity changes or ruptures or is questioned. All in all, the volk cannot survive without a nation and vice-versa.

The three surveyed texts of my research thus emphasize that nation is not a single, homogenous entity, but a pluralistic concept that varies from text to text. It further corroborates that a nation is not necessarily bound by the questions of religion or language. As memoirs, the texts provide insights into the cataclysm of uprootedness and how the birth of nations in the Indian sub-continent is affected by it. As a collective consciousness River of Fire traces the saga of life through myths, cultural mythologies, facts, philosophy of the various times. The text also accredits some of the important people who were otherwise lost in the realms of history. Basti spawns and respects eons of cultural assimilation and synthesis without rendering the text into political aberrations of the times. As a response to the political games of the politicians A Golden Age remarkably covers the factual events of the 1971 War, with the nationalism forming the essential background.
It can be stated here that nations today do not fall under a single definition. With its numerous variants like land, people, their character, the nations today provide as of an identity to an individual as they do to a distinct socio-cultural, historical-political space. The nation is thus created through the history, memory, culture and also through primordial attachment.