

Paper No.	DSE 10
Paper Title	PARTITION LITERATURE
Marks	75% + 25%
Contact Hours (L+T)	5+2 Per Week

ASSIGNMENT QUESTION AND ANSWER

Q. Discuss how *Shadow Lines* & *Basti* document memories of Partition.

A: *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh explores the political and economic growth of India through the lives of two families- one Bengali and one English- as their lives intertwine on multiple levels through three generations. The novel consists of the memories of the characters in the two families. Opening in 1960's Calcutta, the unnamed 8 year old narrator examine the complex interrelationships of the protagonist of the novel, Tribid the narrator's cousin and other members of the two families. Through the memories of the family members, Ghosh also explores the history and growth of the city of Calcutta and India, from World War 2, through the bloody partition years, the Dhaka and Calcutta riots in 1963 and 1964, and continuing to the late twentieth century. Therefore, the characters' memories become the shadow line, the unseen web that connects people, and history, together. The novel's major theme explores the ways in which personal lives are entwined and influenced by political and historical forces.

The novel begins in Calcutta, moves to Delhi where the narrator goes to school, and ends in London. At the beginning of the novel, the 8-year-old narrator introduces the two branches of his family, represented by his grandmother, Tha'mma, and her sister, Mayadebi. Tha'mma, a retired school teacher, is strict, practical, and no-nonsense, having lived through the gruesome nightmare of the partition of her native Bengal region from India. Her chief ambition is to reunite the entire family, particularly to return her uncle, Jethamoshai, from Dhaka. Their family is middle-class. The narrator admires and adores Mayadebi's son, Tribid, because of his deep knowledge of history and his perspective on events and people. However, Mayadebi despairs over her son's, Tribid's, lack of ambition.

Through such events, Ghosh brings together the personal and the political; history according to Ghosh, remains the accumulated experience of memory of those who lived through the events. Without memory there is no history.

Similarly, Intizar Husain's *Basti* is, in many ways, a sweeping novel, beginning in an India still under British rule before the second World War and extending past the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971. But this isn't standard historical fare: Husain offers detailed and often dialogue- heavy scenes, but skips over great periods of time, in a novel that is more photograph album than a narrative focused on continuity.

The central figure Zakir, and the novel begins in his childhood, in the village of Rupanagar, where electricity is just being introduced. Change is a force that can not be stopped: Zakir's father is only absent for a single day from guarding the mosque, but when he returns the electricity has been hooked up, against his wishes; monkeys ,too, are defeated by the high-power wires. Tellingly, too, it is about this time that the plague ravages the local population, Hindu and Muslim.

Relatives move to town, and among them is youth Sabirah, a girl whom Zakir befriends and who remains a constant presence in his life. Setting the tone of their story, young Zakir suggests early on:" let's play bridegroom and bride", but she nervously worries that someone will see- and a rainstorm interrupts later, and they remain separated - Sabirah the one member of her family to remain in India after the 1947 Partition, while all the other Muslims moved to Pakistan, with most of Sabirah's closest relatives going to the eastern part, what would later become Bangladesh. Sabirah remains on Zakir's mind, yet he finds it difficult to reach out and even just contact her over the many years that follow their separation.

The trauma of Partition is strongly evident, yet Husain presents it and much else obliquely. There is conflict, flight, occasional terror, but little of the worst excesses of partition - or then the 1971 war - are described. Instead most is in the vein of: *Basti* is a novel of this uncertain sense of displacement. So, also, it's littered with abandoned houses, left behind by those who fled, new inhabitants often moving in a world turned upside down. Rupanagar is abandoned, but remains the Zakir's lost home; moving to a newly created state demands new allegiances, yet Zakir always remains torn.

Zakir is not convinced by Husain is. There are scenes of precise clarity in *Basti*, but overall feel is one of flashes and fog in this impressionistic novel of these nations and their history. It is successful as such, giving a good feel of these experiences of these times. Even as it can frustrate in its many shifts and often disjointed narrative. *Basti* is a different kind of piecemeal historical novel, less concentrated with detailed realism and continuity; as such, in many ways, it is more true to life.

Thus, both *Shadow Lines* and *Basti* bring out the memories of partition.