

# Partition Sensibility in Bhisham Sahni's Tamas

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## Abstract:

*Writers have interpreted India's partition in a variety of ways. Some use satire in a highly critical language to comment on the better aspect of socio-political reality before and after partition; others relied on their personal vision; and some use the Marxist paradigm for interpreting reality. Tamas (1974) by Bhisham Sahni is "an intellectual atomy of the divide". It combined three literary features stated above to study the structure and dynamics of the event and then the existing society with Marxist overtones. Partition was a terrible event that occurred in India. Many authors have emphasized it in their writings. Tamas was written by Bhishma Sahni, who expressed his emotions through the novel, and when it was telecasted on TV as a serial, it depicted the true anguish of partition. The suffering of men, women and children is a result of communal rioting.*

**Keywords:** Partition, Dislocation, Misery, Unrest, Possession.

Partition of the Indian subcontinent was the single most devastating occurrence in recent history. It unleashed extraordinary, unanticipated and horrific bloodshed. The retribution that ordinary Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs exacted on each other was provoked by the conduct of hooliganism and it coarsened our social sense, warped our political judgments and disordered our notion of what it means to be morally acceptable.

The underlying tragedy of the partition was that it brought a long history of communal co-existence to a halt. Without a doubt, the relationship between Hindus and Muslims was not always free of mistrust, distrust or outright rejection by one group of the other's traditions and rituals. Occasionally, the confrontations were more violent, leading to murder and arson, but such outbursts of communal rage and violence, which were rapidly controlled and normalcy was restored in a short time, people had accepted co-existence as a way of life. Both the communities devised this system to keep tensions and disturbances to a minimum. And, if there were any disagreements or disturbances, the rich diversity of life in the two communities was never substantially harmed. Hindus continued to pay tribute at Dargahs, Muslims continued to participate in Hindu festivals and traders from both faiths continued to exchange goods and services as usual. And, if there were any disagreements or disturbances, the rich diversity of life in the two communities was never substantially harmed. Hindus continued to pay tribute at Dargahs, Muslims continued to participate in Hindu festivals, and traders from both faiths continued to exchange goods and services as usual

Millions of people were disrupted and compelled to travel from one country to the next in search of a place to live as a result of the country's partition. On the other hand, geographical area division generated space difficulties in the people, as thousands of people were forced to leave their birth and job places, where they had been living contentedly for generations and enjoying a favourable psychological space in the hearts of people. They were compelled to relocate to a whole new country that had been assigned to them on religious grounds. As a result of the division of India, an issue of location and space arose, resulting in instability and turmoil.

It had an impact on the people of the country, both physically and mentally, as they were uprooted from their former geographical location and lost a sense of security and belonging as a result of religious fanaticism. "Now there is no country" one of the survivors stated in an interview. We used to have a home, a country, where we felt like we belonged. Now we have no place to call our own. The true country is the one we've abandoned. That was our true home, the place we cherished. Families looked after each other, and relationships were stronger. All that has gone finished." (qtd. in Menon et.al. 220)

*Tamas* (1974) by Bhasham Sahni is an entree into the study of Islamic and Hindu fundamentalism, tracing its beginnings in historical or political events, determining the source of violence that can erupt in its name, and probing the social conditions that promote and nourish such fantasies. With its basic but strong story line about life in the city and its surrounding villages in a district near what is now India's north-western border, the novel captivated the nation's interest.

It all begins with Nathu, a poor chamar and tanner by trade, who is ordered by Murad Ali to murder a pig for a pittance of five rupees. Murad Ali's claim about the pig being required by the veterinary doctor is believed by Nathu, who struggles to deal with the tenacious pig. The pig is ultimately killed, and it is taken away by Kalu, the Jamadar (the sweeper), just before dawn, as per Ali's instructions. The dead pig (which Islam considers unclean and nasty) is then placed on the mosque's steps, causing a ruckus in the city. Riots in the city are thus broken up. On the other side, Congress workers make every effort to emulate Mahatma Gandhi's determination to take to the streets, singing patriotic songs that rapidly transform into a mission to clean up the community's streets in order to instill pride in the local and civic infrastructure. Their disdain for being compelled to undertake this work is palpable, and some believe it is merely a symbolic act, as they do not wish to physically labour on public facilities. The conflict begins with Mahmood Saheb preventing the group from entering a Muslim Mohalla because he believes the Muslims accompanying the congress party are traitors to their religion. He claims that the Congress party is solely for Hindus, whereas the Muslim League is solely concerned with Muslim interests. The throwing of stones at congress party workers, as well as the general agitation, stymies any further cleaning attempts, and the party disperses quickly. It demonstrates that regional identification trumps nationalist identity. Bhasham Sahni seeks to draw attention to the Hindu-Muslim relationship. Despite living side by side for generations, Hindus and Muslims are distrustful of one another. It's easy to notice how insecure they feel in other's presence.

Whether they liked it or not, interaction between these societies occurred. They formed a socio-cultural bond, and they began to live together. This support and consideration, however, was only on the surface. Professional specialisation was practised by Indians according to their community. It is one of the defining characteristics of traditional Indian culture. Muslims were assigned employment based on their caste. Both Hindus and Muslims developed hostility and mistrust as a result of the cultural and social inequality, leading to partition. In the novel, we see the same kind of civilization.

During riots, violence was organised and methodical. Hindu and Sikh shops and businesses were targeted for burning and looting in West Punjab, while Muslim property and residences were targeted in East Punjab. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin claim in *Borders and Boundaries* that they had good interactions with other cast members, but only to a certain extent.

Thousands of people who had previously enjoyed physical and mental space experienced extreme upheaval and psychological distress as a result of dislocation, leading to emotions of insecurity. The effect of dislocation can be visualised using a plant's roots as an example. The ability of a root to expand in the small creak of the rock demonstrates its ability to make space and adapt to its surroundings. When humans try to establish themselves in a new area, they do the same thing. They make few changes to themselves and attempt to blend in with others in order to belong to a specific location, gain security, and feel a sense of belonging. If a plant with well-adjusted roots is pulled out of the creak and placed on fertile ground with other roots of its sort, believing that the soil is the perfect place to grow it, the root will eventually fade, drying the plant. It occurs as a result of a change in the environment to which the roots have already adapted. Similarly, when people who have adapted to one region are relocated due to caste, religion, lifestyle, or other factors, they confront a slew of challenges with relocation and re-establishment in a new life in a distant land, resulting in insecurity and disorder.

Several individuals in Bhisham Sahni's novel *Tamas* are compelled to relocate from a well-populated space to an unfamiliar location, resulting in confusion and uncertainty. Harnam Singh and Banto, an elderly Sikh couple, were the only Sikh family in their community and were fully immersed in its culture, where everyone lived in perfect harmony while adhering to their own beliefs and vocation. The elderly couple ran a tea store that was well-known across the town and served as a hub for social, religious, and political debates as well as community building. Harnam and Manto had lived in the hamlet their entire lives and had married their daughter from there, so they were deeply attached to their home and the people. The village is peaceful and serene at the start of the novel, and the residents feel safe despite the fact that riots have broken out. "Listen, my dear woman, we have never thought ill of anyone; we have never hurt anyone," Harnam Singh, who is confident in their reputation in the hamlet, assures his wife, who is afraid of the riots. The people in the village have also been helpful (Sahni, *Tamas* 215). They were both consoled by the village's most respected man and their old Muslim friend Karim Khan, who told them "no less than ten times that they should continue to live here with an easy mind" (Sahni 215).

However, this friend soon informs them that miscreants from the other village have arrived in their village and are threatening to hurt them in a social outburst. He advises them “Things have taken a bad turn, Harnam Singh. Your welfare lies in leaving the place as the marauders may come from outside. We will not be able to stop them” (Sahni 216). Hearing this, the elderly couple is forced to flee in order to avoid individuals who had previously drank tea at his tea store and were familiar with them. Partition had turned longtime friends against each other, and their own land had become foreign to them. Thus, under the guise of religion, space that they had made in the hearts of others was taken away. They had become strangers to those they had previously called family and who had shared their pleasures and sorrows.

Another example of space is the story of the wealthy Hindu Lalaji family, who live in a neighbourhood with numerous Muslim friends and neighbours. When the unrest started, Lalaji asked his family to leave, but his wife refused, claiming that “Why should you be so worried? Are you afraid of your neighbor? I am not” (Sahni 158), but soon seeing the harsh reality of riots they decided to move out to a Hindu locality at the thought of their grown-up daughters. “If anything untoward happens where shall we conceal our daughters?” (Sahni 158). As a successful trader, he held a prestigious and prominent status in society, but partition displaced all of these privileges, putting the wealthy in the same position as the poor. People from other communities were driven to relocate due to the violent indignation of one community, where they would find similar tradition and culture. They had to abandon all of their worldly possessions as well as emotional attachments in order to do so, which resulted in mental trauma and a space problem for future generations.

On the one hand, Partition created a psychological space problem; on the other hand, it caused thousands of people to be displaced, creating a physical space difficulty. The novel depicts the psychology of people who form groups and committees to protect their respective areas. A Hindu community lives nearby, yet it is surrounded by Muslims. Following the declaration of partition, Hindus banded together and proposed the formation of 'Mohalla Committees,' which would include a 'Volunteer Corps' and 'Youth Wings,' whose duties would be to assist Hindus in distress and fight during unrest respectively. “They began considering seriously how best to unite Hindu and the Sikh in large scale and draw up plans for joint defence.” (Sahni 77)

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