



## Partition: The communal Divide with Special Reference to Bhisham Sahani's Tamas

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### **Abstract**

The partition of India was a black chapter in the history of India. Many writers have attempted to show the vivid reality of the communal violence, exodus and sufferings of the people of India and Pakistan. This research is an attempt to study the novel '*Tamas*' written by Bhisham Sahani which shows the anguishes and sorrows of people. It is based on true events of the uprisings of 1947. The title *Tamas* suggests darkness and death which relates with the atmosphere of that time. The paper will study in detail the communal violence as depicted by Bhisham Sahani in his novel Tamas.

**Keywords:** Partition, Communal Violence, Tamas, Sufferings

### **Introduction**

The partition of India is a contentious issue in South Asian history. It will never be known how many people killed in the riots that followed, although it is now thought that one million people died. Around twelve million people were forced to relocate across the newly defined borders, a scale that has never been seen before in recorded history. The violence associated with Partition and the following uprooting resulted in tremendous human agony and sorrow, which has since faded from memory. Nonetheless, its greatest lasting effect is that it continues to leave an indelible mark on parts of daily life in the subcontinent, as the carnage of Partition is repeated with horrific regularity in a number of incidents more than sixty years later. This was evident in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Hundreds of Muslims were slain in one of India's bloodiest communal riots in 1989 in Bhagalpur, Bihar. The Babri Masjid was demolished a few years later, in 1992. Thousands of Muslims in Surat, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai were afterwards targeted. The Sabarmati Express was destroyed in a fire in 2002. Gujarat's Godhra riots happened as a result of this. In a separate incident in 2007, the Samjautha Express was attacked in an attempt to derail Indo-Pakistan peace talks. In each of these cases, the aggressors selectively used

Partition stories and memories: militant Hindus were mobilised using the one-sided argument that Muslims had killed Hindus at Partition, that they had raped Hindu women, and that they, in turn, must be killed, and their women subjected to violence. All of this suggests that Partition is still a part of the collective consciousness. Partition's unfinished business haunts the country, implying that historical wrongs must be righted. All of this appears to contradict the popular assumption that Partition can be readily forgotten. Partitions can be found everywhere, including ethnic tensions, religious extremism, and ongoing religious divisions. Yet, prior to Partition, such violent ethnic clashes between Hindus and Muslims would have been unthinkable, as scholars, writers, and the general public emphasised the syncretism and composite nature of Indian society, which defined shared values and traditions that had allowed diverse communities to coexist peacefully for centuries. It's crucial to emphasise this point fusion and integration of Hindu and Muslim populations at various levels, as well as the importance they placed on religious tolerance and pluralism in their daily lives, where all three communities remained undifferentiated: Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh. (Bhasin)

The literature, not Indian history, tells us about the black historical split. History has only praised the independence struggle and its accomplishments. In history, we discover absolute neglect in the portrayal of the black historical division of sovereign India into India and Pakistan. However, in literature, several writers have attempted to depict the reality of the division and how it affects political, economic, religious, cultural, social, and geographical factors. This tragic event of partition profoundly informed and affected Indian English novelists. These books are based on the heinous crimes done in the name of religion after or during partition. Only a few novelists have depicted partition in a realistic manner. It may contain Kushwant Singh's *Train To Pakistan*, among other things. *The Rape* by Raj Gill, *A Bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgonkar, and *Azadi* by Chaman Nahal, as well as references in the writings of B. Rajan and Bhabani Bhattacharya. *Tamas* by Bhishma Sahni also deals with this religious fervour. It was written in Hindi and translated into English three decades later by Jai Rajan. (pawar)

## Tamas

As a framework of partition, *Tamas* illustrates community violence caused by extremists in the three communities, and how people were tricked into serving the communalists' hidden motives by instilling tension and hostility for their own aims at the expense of intercommunal harmony. '*Tamas*' is the title of the film. On the eve of India's division, it appears to be an attempt to illustrate and criticise the ignorance and darkness inherent in communal violence. At the request of a Muslim Leaguer, Murad Ali, a pig is killed and thrown on the steps of a mosque in the novel's first incident. The remaining episodes, set against this backdrop, are meant to demonstrate how communalism's tentacles have expanded to rural places. (pawar)

During the Partition, there was a struggle between communities to occupy a geographical area because they claimed it was their religious right to dwell there. People were displaced in large numbers. Some men desired to travel to Hindu territory, a place where they could practise their religion, while others did not wish to leave their homeland. Those who refused to go became victims of political turmoil that was inadvertently started by politicians. The British and the enforcers of law and order enabled mass bloodshed and kidnappings in order to settle the area's perimeter. All Muslims living in Hindu areas were forcibly removed, and their valuable things were taken away as well. (Jessica Rawson)

Many examples can be taken from Bhisham Sahni's novel *Tamas* of such confusion and uncertainty as people were forced to move out of their own homes to an unknown place to save their lives. An old couple Harnam Singh and Banto, the only Sikh couple in the village had a tea shop which used to serve different communities before the riots. Their tea shop was the place for all kinds of discussions related to any social, religious, political or geographical issues.

Harnam and Banto had lived in the village their entire lives and had married their daughter from there, so they were very loyal to their home and the people. The village is peaceful and serene at the start of the story, and the residents feel safe despite the fact that riots have broken out. Harnam Singh who is confident with their image in the village consoles his wife who fears the consequence of riots saying

*"Listen, my good woman, we have never thought ill of anyone; we have never harmed anyone. People in the village too have been good to us."* (Sahni 215)

They both were comforted by the most respected man of the village and their old Muslim friend Karim Khan who also

*"No less than ten times," he informed them, "we 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.

*"Things have taken a horrible turn, Harnam Singh," he advises. Because marauding marauders may appear from the outside, it is in your best interests to leave the area. We shall be powerless to stop them"* (Sahni 216).

Hearing this, the elderly couple is obliged to flee in order to avoid being pursued by individuals who had previously sipped tea at his tea store and were familiar with them. (Jessica Rawson)

Banto and Harnam Singh had sought refuge at a Muslim home owned by Ehsan Ali, an old Harnam customer, and witnessed their trunk being carried into the courtyard as a symbol of success. When Ehsan Ali's son failed to break the lock after repeated attempts, Harnam Singh, who was hidden in the loft, gave the key to open it. Their home, which had been built with love and hard work, had been burned down, and all of their costly and treasured belongings had been taken by their known people. Criminals broke into people's homes to take valuables such as jewellery, money, cattle, and other items that they had left behind to be claimed when they returned. Many of them had no idea where their rightful land belonged during Partition because they had lived in harmony and peace with members of other religions in a land, they called their own for years. (Jessica Rawson)

Partition had turned long-time friends against one other, and their own land had become strange 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 is the story of the wealthy Hindu Lalaji family, who live in a neighbourhood with numerous Muslim friends and neighbours. When the rioting began, Lalaji requested that his family leave, but his wife refused, adding, *"Why should you be so worried?" Do you have a fear of your next-door neighbour? "I am not"* (Sahni 158), but the unpleasant reality quickly set in. (Jessica Rawson)

As a result of the violence, they decided to relocate to a Hindu neighbourhood with their grown daughters. *"Where will we hide our daughters if something bad happens?"* 158 (Sahni). As a wealthy 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 destitute. People from other communities were driven to relocate due to the violent indignation of one community, where they would find similar tradition and culture. As a result, they had to abandon all of their worldly possessions as well as their emotional attachments, resulting in mental trauma and a space problem for future generations. (Jessica Rawson)

The people of Sayedpur, for example, were "as proud of being Sayedpur residents as were the Muslims" despite the confusion of place (Sahni 287). Both communities claimed ownership of Sayedpur, claiming that it belonged to everyone. Sikhs in the area were threatened with expulsion, but they remained confined to the village's little gurudwara due to fear and refusal to leave. They couldn't leave since they didn't know where else they could go that was safer. Apart from their own village, they had resided here for a long time. They would rather die and confront death in their own country, either by plunging into a well with children or by sacrificing one another

with swords and kirpans. Nahal has deftly described the entire spectacle of Sayedpur women leaping into the well. After realising they had little chance of victory or survival against the Muslims, the Sikh women realised what they needed to do to protect themselves.

They gathered around a well with their children without saying anything, and "Jasbir Kaur was the first one to leap into the well." 293) (Nahal). She jumped to her death without saying anything, only saying her Wahe Guru's name. Following her was a long line of women, some married, some with children, and many who had not yet married, all of whom were destined for the same fate. "Hari Singh's wife stepped up, stood there for a time, then grabbed up her four-year-old boy" (293) and dove into the abyss. Few children were left behind in the chaos, and they were later pushed by other ladies. "Prem Singh's wife leapt down, but her husband did not." Her son, on the other hand, was left standing against the wall. Gyan Singh's wife placed the infant down the well, and he was returned to his mother's arms." (293) In her book *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia, a well-known feminist critic, interviews Basant Kaur, a mass suicide survivor, who recounts:

*"Many girls were slaughtered. Mata Lajjawanti, on the other hand, had a well near her house, in the form of a garden. Then we all jumped in, about a hundred of us... [sic] a hundred and four... [sic] boys and females. Each and every one of us. Even boys, and not just little boys, but grown-up boys. I stepped in as well, with my two children, and we jumped right in—I had some jewellery and other items on me. I had fourteen rupees in my ears, on my wrists, and in my pockets. I gathered everything and tossed it in, and then I hopped in"* (qtd. in Butalia 158).

The reason for this tragedy is because the people of Sayedpur had no idea to which country they actually belonged because a person's original place is decided by his ancestors' homeland. Sayedpur was the only place people knew and belonged; it was where they were born, played, married, worked, and raised their families. They were unable to disconnect from their land and, as a result, were unable to find a suitable place to live following their dislocation. The same trauma may be witnessed in different other characters as they fly from one location to the next in search of a safe and secure location. Many times, both communities claimed the same piece of land and were unable to agree on the boundaries. As stated in *Tamas* as the rioting erupted, People were running down the street, attempting to kill one another while recognising childhood friends, neighbours with whom they had shared lunch, and coworkers with whom they had worked. Nobody knew who had the rightful ownership of the land or why they were battling with one another. All they knew was that due to the split, they would have to leave their motherland. (Jessica Rawson)

The novelist makes it obvious that the three communities—Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs—were to blame for fire, rape, murder, and conversions committed in the name of religion. The book appears to perceive the British and community groups' nefarious goals mostly via Richard, an I.C.S. The issue of partition is introduced in a conversation between Richard and his wife Liza. Their discussion elucidates how the divide-and-rule tactic wreaked devastation by alienating individuals and making them distrustful of one another. Because they understood

*"the Indians are an irascible people and highly volatile...ready to shed blood in the name of religion,"*

the British purposefully tried to promote communalism's expansion. The British played the role of a bystander instead of controlling communal violence. (pawar)

The central theme of *Tamas* is the devastating repercussions of communal politics that lead to separation. The basic structure of society was disrupted by glorifying former leaders along community lines and combining religious symbols with party politics. Despite taking starkly opposed and antagonistic perspectives, communal historians used essentially the same historiographic framework, premises, and assumptions. History is being perverted in order to instil their policies and political and social ideas. People were told to look at others warily and as if they were enemies.



This is the novel in which the processes of communal politics, which are strongly rooted at the urban level, insinuate themselves into rural communities. However, its political process is an inherent element of and a microcosm of sectarian politics at the national level, rather than being self-contained. The communal groups could only function and act at the command of their communal leaders since they were blind to 'the same origins.' The novel is notable because Bhishma Sahni brilliantly portrays how communal leaders forced religious symbols into service and fought over them under the cover of religion. The gloom of prejudice and community hysteria always looms over them, 'Tamas,' and it continues to do so. As a result, the novelist masterfully depicted the untold story of the partition.

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