
Trauma of Partition in Bhisma Sahni's

“Tamas”

Dr Preeti Pareek

Assistant Professors

Government College of Engineering and Technology

Bikaner, Rajasthan India

Abstract

Partition is something very dreadful which took place in India. It is highlighted by the writing's of many authors. Bhisma Sahni's who wrote Tamas has pen down his emotions through this novel and when this novel in the form of TV serial was aired on the Doordarshan channels it showed the actual Tauma of Partition. The condition of men ,women and children how they suffered due to communal riots.

Full Length

A traumatic historical event usually finds the artistic and literary response twice. Once, during the event or immediately following it and again after a lapse of time, when the event has found its corner in the collective memory of the generation that witnessed it. The initial response tends to be emotionally intense and personal in character, even melodramatic. On the other hand, when the event is reflected upon with emotional detachment and objectivity, a clearer pattern of the various forces that shaped it is likely to emerge. *Tamas* is the reflective response to the partition of India – one of the most tragic events in the recent history of the Indian subcontinent. (5)

Several authors have written about communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims during the Partition. The writings differ from men to women writers. The women write about partition through the feminist perspectives, they feel the pain, trauma undergone by them. While men just write about divisions of lands and the migration of the people which created two countries. These religious conflicts led to bloodshed, mass migration, huge loss of life and property. Actually Partition in 1947 was a momentous event woven into the socio-political fabric of India as a nation and the roots of fundamentalism have flourished and resurfaced every once in a while in the nation – state's history.

In Indian subcontinent all religious fights, communal fights, riots or collective violence are incited and orchestrated under the name which constitutes the first kind of (anti) nationalisms. Space and territory are the central elements in religious nationalism. As Peter Van der Vur has discussed in his work on Religious Nationalism, *Hindus and Muslims in India*:

The nation is often imagined as a brotherhood of men protecting their women folk. Men are portrayed as strong and powerful, women as weak and powerless. But protection also implies the exertion of male authority to which women have to submit. (85)

It is said that religious fundamentalism is anti nationalist in four ways. Firstly, the assumption is primordial religious or regional identity supercedes the nationalistic identity i.e. they want their own identity rather than making an identity of nation. Secondly they are anti-national since in the rioting most of the damage and destruction is very often against state property or the existing civic infrastructure besides property owned by the other community. Thus both the communities when they express anger against each other destroy the property of the nation and others by arsoning and burning. This aspect of rioting leads to and underscores the absolute predictability of the outcome resulting into a breakdown of law and order which helps to create a vacuum that terror groups exploit to their advantage. This is the third way in which collective violence or rioting is provoked by religious fundamentalism and is anti-national in its orientation because it provides the ultimate link to threats by terror groups towards destabilizing the nation – state. The fourth aspect of religious

fundamentalisms as anti-nationalist is a little more indirect and complex. It arises out of the rejection of the western goods, secular, English speaking and modern identity associated with the nation. Thus by the boycott of western goods, feelings of Swaraj dwelled in the minds of people. By the speeches of Mahatma Gandhi they started thinking about freedom, thus there was an end to the divide and rule policy of Britishers. India became free in 1947. These four aspects of Hindu, Islamic and Sikh fundamentalisms, rioting and collective violence are focused here.

Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1974) is an entry into the examination of Islamic and Hindu fundamentalism, to trace its origins in historical or political events, to determine the cause of violence that can abruptly erupt in its name and to interrogate the conditions in society that help foster and nurture such imaginings. The novel captured the nation's imagination with its simple but powerful story line about the life in the city and its surrounding villages in a district near what would now comprise the north-western border of India and Pakistan. It starts with Nathu, a poor *chamar*, a tanner by profession, who is asked to kill a pig by Murad Ali for a pittance – five rupees. Nathu buys Murad Ali's story about the pig being required by the veterinary doctor and struggles to tackle the resilient pig. The pig is finally killed and as per Ali's instructions it is hauled away by Kalu, the *Jamadar* (the sweeper) just before the break of dawn. The dead pig (deemed unclean and dirty by Islam) is then unceremoniously left on the steps of the mosque, stirring trouble in the city. Riots thus break up in the city. On the other hand Congress workers try hard to follow Mahatma Gandhi's resolve to step out, singing patriotic songs which quickly turns into a mission to clean the streets of the community to foster pride in the local and civic infrastructure. Their own disdain at being forced to do this work is obvious and some of them perceive it to be meant only as a symbolic gesture and do not want to physically labor on public amenities. The trouble starts out early with the party being stopped from entering a Muslim *Mohalla* by Mahmood Saheb because he declares the Muslims who are accompanying the congress party as traitors to their religion. He asserts that the congress party is only for Hindus and the Muslim League alone looks out for the interest of Muslims. The hurling of stones at the congress party workers and the general feeling of unrest disrupts any further cleaning efforts and the party disperses immediately. It shows that regional identity supercedes the nationalist identity. Bhisham Sahni here wants to highlight the relation of Hindus and Muslim. Despite having lived together for centuries Hindus and Muslims do not trust each other. It is easy to find how insecure they feel in other's presence.

Interaction between these communities took place whether they like it or not. Socio-cultural linkage developed and naturally they started living together. But this support and consideration was superficial. Indians followed community wise professional specialization. It is one of the hallmarks of traditional Indian society. Muslims were given jobs according to their caste. The cultural and social-discrimination led to suspicion and mistrust in hearts of both Hindus and Muslims and the result was Partition. We see the same type of society in the novel.

Most of the cloth-shops are of the Hindus, shoe-shops belong to Musalmaans motar-lorry works are with Musalmaans, grains business is in Hindu's hand. Petty jobs are done by Hindus and Musalmaans both. (91-92)

During riots, violence was, by most reckonings, organized and systematic: Hindu and Sikh shops and business were singled out for burning and looting in West Punjab, Muslim's property and homes in East Punjab. In *Borders and Boundaries* Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin say they had friendly relations with other cast but up to certain limit.

Roti-beti ka rishta nahi rakhte the, baki sab theek tha.

We neither broke bread with them, nor inter-married, but the rest was fine.(12)

In *The Other Side of Silence* Urvashi Butalia says that Hindus had very good relations with Muslims. They were regarded as untouchables which sowed the seeds of partition.

All this sowed the seeds of mutual hatred; mistrust in the heart and minds of an average Indian and Pakistani. These are some of the facts of Partition. As facts, they recount only the minutest part of history.

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