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## Themes, Symbols and Metaphors of Partition in Indian Literature: A Critical Analysis of *Tamas* by Bhisham Sahni

Sumitra Dahiya 'Seim'  
Author, Poet and Translator.

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### Abstract:

This paper focuses upon nature and need for partition for humankind. And also studies how it savagely drives humankind. So here are some questions related to topic that will be discussed: What is a partition? What is the meaning of Tamas? Is partition an excuse of bloodshed and savagery? What is the symbolic relevance of partition in Tamas? What is the cultural significance of partition in Tamas?

**Keywords:** Blood, lot, history, brotherhood, civilization, root, religion.

### 1. Introduction:

The first great battle of India is known as the Battle of Mahabharata, on the land division of Hastinapura and Inderprastha. In this battle, the whole nation divided into two parts, Kauravas and Pandavas. After this never-ending combat, there had left only two living human beings: Kripyacharya and Balram, but it happened just because they were not the actual participators of the battle. Bible tells the story of Cain and Abel; their first need was partition of property. In *Robinson Crusoe*, all lost sailors divided their parts of land according to the citizenship of the country they belong while it was another concern that they were surviving on a desert island without any connection of outer world. This kind of reference arises many questions about the relevance of partition in literature. These are the outcomes of partition; destruction, bloodshed, migration, pain, rejection, hatred, anger. Thousands of decades have passed but partition didn't change its face. It appears time by time in a new way and brings the same experiences. Partition came into existence when the first human started to multiply himself in numbers. There are many tales and annals in old sculptures that partition was the only a solution to keep safe different cultures and civilizations that they do not make mixtures.

## 2. Partition Literature:

There are many different works in literature and in cinema presented by authors and artists those are based on the theme of partition: *Ice-candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa, *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry, *Midnight Children* by Salman Rushdie, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hosain, *The Dark Dancer* by Balachandra Rajan, *Aadha Gaon* by Rahi Mason, *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri, *Kitne Pakistan* by Intizar Hussain, *The Broken Mirror* by Krishna Baldev Vaid, *Ali Purka Ali* by Mumtaz Mufti, *Khaakaur Khoon* by Nasim Hijazi; short story collections like: *Kingdom's End and Other Stories* by Sadat Hasan Manto, *Ravi Paar and Other Stories* by Sampooran Singh Gulzar; movies like: *Garam Hawa*, *Gadar Ek Prem Katha*, *Kissa*, *Silent Waters*, and *Dastaan*.

Bhasham Sahni's (1915-2003) epic work *Tamas* is a novel based on the riots of 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. Sahni experienced it himself at Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Sahni was born in 1915 in an Arya Samaj family in Rawalpindi and died in 2003, Delhi, India. His some masterpiece works were *Bhagya Rekha* a short story collection, *Pali*, *Amritsar Aa Gaya Hai*, *Neelu-Neelima-Nilopher*, and *Tamas*. He also translated twenty Russian books into Hindi and has been the editor of *Nayi Kahaniya* magazine in 1965 till 1967. He won the 'Sahitya Akademi Award' for the novel *Tamas*. Two of his stories *Pali* and *Amritsar Aa Gaya Hai* are also based on the Partition.

### 3.1. 'Tamas' meaning and title of the book:

'Tamas' is a Sanskrit word. There are three 'gunas' or qualities in the Hindu mythology: Rajas (action), Tamas (darkness), and Satva (goodness or enlightenment). There is the concept to do the action to transform himself or herself from darkness to enlightenment. But Sahni used the title as irony of Indian people's mental state. All the people were in darkness. There was no light. Nobody knew where should go or where were they going, for what they were killing one another and why were they looting poor.



**A painting on Mahabharata. It is the scene of after war. Duryodhana has died and all women are crying on his dead body. Draupadi has tied her hair now and explaining why Duryodhana was killed.**

### **3.2. Roots of Origin:**

India is known as the Golden Bird, in the perspectives of historical determination; it were not the British who drew the boundary of India but the Teeraths of India that established it as one nation. India was truly in its actual form as it was before attacked by Turks. With the mixture of Islam and Hinduism, they created a new generation named Muslims. Muslims origin doesn't belong to India, however, it will not be wrong to say that their present generation is Indian. Their bones and flash are equally mixed with Indian soil as Hindus'. They have equally mixed in this culture and have become a part of this nation. They exchange breads and brides too, their great-grand-fathers might have been foreigners but their parents and children are Indians. Their roots are in this soil, Indian soil. Richard, an English deputy commissioner in *Tamas* tells to his wife Liza about the relationship of both Hindu and Muslim communities:

The first lot came from central Asia...and those that followed after a lapse of many centuries were also from the same stock. Their origin, so to speak, was the same. The first bunch was known as the Aryans. They came into this country thousands of years

ago. The others who were known as Muslims made inroads into this country thousands of years ago. But their roots were the same. (Sahni, 2008)

In this novel, both communities are unaware of the facts about their origin and roots. They are just searching identity in *Tamas* and that's why they cannot recognize their blood. They cannot see which blood they are slaying is half of their own. There is a detailed description in the novel where people blindly assume other communities in the wrong way. Bhasham Sahni writes:

The Turks had come, but they were from the neighboring villages. The Sikhs believed, they were settling scores with their traditional enemies the same Turks with whom the Khalsas used to battle two hundred years ago. It was just one more line in the historic chain of battle. (Sahni, 2008)

Sahni mocks this wrong thinking of people but this mockery echoes the sound of terror, swords and daggers. The echo of ignorance as Sahni states, 'their feet were in the twentieth century but head was in the middle of that.' (Sahni, 2008) This search of origin and roots created a dividing line between both of them. If someone is different from one's community he must deserve punishment:

Nobody knew his origins ...what it the sight of Milkhi's centipede-like tuft or was it the thought of the congregation in the mosque? Or was it what he had been seeing and hearing for the past three days finally taking its toll? Taking two steps at a time he kicked Milkhi in the back... (Sahni, 2008)

It was a shocking brutality that is visible in the character of Shah Nawaz. In reality, he was not aware of the origin or true identity of Milkhi but if he was not able to resemble the people of his community he might be thinking of their death: 'The man's eyes were open as if they were trying to guess why Khanji had punished him so cruelly.' (Sahni, 2008) Perhaps, the crime was his belonging to a different community.

### **3.3. Pakistan:**

It is clear in the pages of history that the area called Pakistan was not the part of India as Muslims were not the natives of India. But when Turks came they joined small pieces of land and made it one nation, and learnt to live together. Sahni throws the light upon

the companionship of Hindu and Muslim and reveals their hidden desire for a separate nation. He writes:

In the city there was a clear cut demarcation of work, the Hindu owned of the cloth shops, the Muslims the footwear stores. The transport business was in the hands of Muslims whereas the Hindus had a monopoly of the grain trade.(Sahni, 2008)

It is going just as neighbor nations exchange goods and services to one another. The entire range of activities was orchestra rated to a certain rhythm-the rhythm of the city. But when the conversation turns the subject of nation it divided into Hindustan and Pakistan. When Bakshiji delivered the speech over the unity of the nation and provokes for the fight against British rulers, there occurs a debate among party members. Bakshiji says; 'Freedom will be for everything. It will be for the whole of Hindustan.' A Muslim member replies; 'The liberation of Hindustan will benefit the Hindus only. The Muslims can feel free only in Pakistan.'(Sahni, 2008)

After the incident of finding the Pig's dead body in Mosque, there appeared immediately many Pakistans in Indian mohallas. The limits of Hindu and Muslim mohallas had suddenly been clearly demarcated. The Hindus and the Sikhs dared not trespass into Muslim mohallas or the Muslims into Hindu and the Sikh lanes...Where Hindus and Muslims happened to live together, only one sentence was heard, uttered again and again. It's too bad! It's too bad!(Sahni, 2008)

The nation was fragmented into religious identity. There were the small Pakistans; Pakistans in mohallas, Pakistans in streets and hearts too.

...from now on, no Hindu will live in Muslim mohallas and no Muslim in Hindu mohallas...Pakistan or no Pakistan it is very clear that each community is going to live in watertight.(Sahni, 2008)

An old man exhorted them; 'Have some sense, if an outsider wasn't able to get in, neither would you able to get out.'(Sahni, 2008)



**An abstract image of India-Pakistan Image.**

### **3.4. Party Politics:**

Different political parties keep people apart for their political purposes. Earlier, it was the politics of British rulers but slowly it entered in the customs of Indian administration and became the part of it. Liza wife of an English commissioner Richard says; ‘I knew everything. They fight against you for the sake of their country and you make them fight against one another in the name of religion.’ Richard replies her in an easy tone; ‘The rulers don't look for similarities among the ruled. They are only interested in finding out what can keep them apart.’(Sahni, 2008) Their sense of hatred for each other gave space to British for establishing their roots in this country. It was the one reason that gave them a perfect environment to rule. These people must be aware of this fact. Liza asked about the same root history of Hindu and Muslim: ‘They only know what we tell them...they don't know their history. They only live it.’ She also asks about the loss of lives and destroying wealth that is harming the country. Richard replies very strictly: ‘The country is not mine, but the subject is.’(Sahni, 2008)

In *Animal Farm*, George Orwell tells the politics of mediators, pigs those were trying to justify their behavior and keep other animals in the dark. In the novella, pigs heartily embrace their Major's visionary ideal of socialism, but after Major dies, they twist the meaning of its words. In reality, the partition was completely unfortunate and should not have

taken place but it did happen because of some selfish political leaders. All credits, according to Sahni to the unswerving support of the politicians like Nehru and Jinnah who for their self-interest took part in that despicable political deal. A follower of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Stanley Wolpert, writes in favor of partition in his book, *Jinnah of Pakistan*:

Few individuals significantly alter the course of history. Fewer still modify the map of the world. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. Mohammad Ali Jinnah did all three. (Wolpert, 2005)

Even Mahatma Gandhi also did not give sufficient statement to relief the miserable population of India when he said: 'Partition is bad. But whatever is past is past. We have only to look to the future.' (Hajari, 2015)

### **3.5. Brother or Ill-blood:**

Appearance of partition, changes its face according to the requirement of the viewers. Sometimes it appears as the allegorical story of two brothers as *Gunday* or sometimes it converts itself in the tale of two lovers as *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*, or *Dastan*. But the first appearance is the most popular version of the story. In the partition of India and Pakistan, most of the time it discussed as the example of Hindu-Muslim are brothers. But Sahni gives a cunning example of this relationship when Raghunath consoles Shah Nawaz his best friend: 'It really hurts...Brother is cutting brother's throat.'(Sahni, 2008)And after this, there spread a long silence between them because they were realizing the actual condition of their relationship. The enmity between brothers was one thing but the enmity between a Muslim and a Hindu had other sinister implications.

Maybe that's the reason why the entire brotherhood of Hindu and Muslim couldn't keep control of their ill-blood. In *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh provides human accounts in a diverse, detailed character depiction where every person has a unique point of view, points out that everyone is equally at fault and that placing blame on each other was irrelevant.

### **3.6. Pig:**

When the novel opens, there is a detailed description of an animal, pig that leads the theme of the novel till the end; not only Sahni but many other writers also used this animal as

a motif and there are many strong reasons behind it. Pig belongs to the dirtiest and lowest rank among the domestic animals and also has poor and awful featuring in its appearance. It presents the ugliest or disgusting side of human society. Lower people those are rejected, refused by society and are living an isolated life; apart from it, with a feeling of bitterness towards their own life. Pig is the most horrible and appropriate image of those subalterns. They are wild, they are dirty, they are brutal and they are bloody beasts. Beast (pig) is inside each one of them. The protagonist of the first incident, Nathu has a contract to kill a pig; it made him hard, however, he was a butcher and it was his profession to kill animals but it was a different experience to him. He got horrified of the pig that was ugly, big and with a jungle of bristles on its belly and white hair around its snout, thick and stiff like a porcupine's and its small tail curled over its back like a whiplash. He was trying to kill that beast but it was going so hard for him. Even that pig had injured his leg with its mouth. Nathu cried, 'this brute is going to be the death of me.' (Sahni, 2008) Power holders always try to behead these disgusting creatures but they rise again and again, don't abolish ever. Pig is the face of this category. It is the symbol of Beelzebub, the angel of death and cruelty who lives in the lowest part of the earth and has the lowest rank in morality. Beelzebub is the ghost of the savagery who dwells in the darkest side of the human heart. He (beast) says "I am a part of you." In *Animal Farm*; 'The creatures outside looked from pig to man and from man to pig and from pig to man again but already it was impossible to say which was which.' (Orwell, 2011) In *Lord of the Flies* boys see beast in one another and always get frightened. It was their fear that was taking shape of a beast and when Simon tries to bring the truth to the rest of the boys, they kill Simon in a frenzy pointing to him '...kill the beast! Cut the throat! Spill his blood!' (Golding, 1954) Exactly like this the same situation is in *Tamas*, The pig's body glowed in Nathu's mind, wherever he was going, he could see in every human appearance. He assumes a Muslim as a black pig that was, 'dark, thicket and short-statured he would appear at any place, in any lane, on any road of the city without any apparent reason.' He asked himself, 'was the pig going to charge him? It could bite him, maul him badly.' (Sahni, 2008)



**A still of pig from the movie *Lord of the Flies*.**

### **3.7. Savagery:**

At the moment of partition, it seems very confused that, was it the willing exercise of people? or was it just imposed upon them? *Tamas* concerns the conflict between two competing impulses that exists within all human beings; first is the instinct to live by rules, act peacefully and follow moral commands. Second act violently to obtain supremacy over others and enforces one's will on others. This conflict might be expressed in many ways: order vs. chaos, civilization vs. savagery; reason vs. impulse; law vs. anarchy. Sahni stress on the savage part of the social man, however, man develops himself and his civilization, and his basic roots come from the age of savagery. During the reading of the novel, there occurs a dilemma in the mind that what we are? Humans? Or animals? Or savages?



**A rare photo of British India. People are moving after left their home lands.**

In an incident some chaos were talking about their last night hunting experiences, one told;

The moment we entered the lane, the kararas took to their heels! One of the Hindu girls climbed to the roof of her house when lot happened to spot her. About twelve of us climbed up to the roof. She was about to jump over the railing to the next roof when we caught her: Nabi, Lalu, Meet, Murtaza-they all had her turn by turn.

Really? One of them asked.

Yes. I swear by Allah. When my turn came, she said neither 'no' nor 'yes' as she lay under me. She didn't even stir. And then I found that she was dead...I had been doing it with a corpse!(Sahni, 2008)

During the taking place of this conversation, it was easily clear that partition was not the matter of misfortune, it was the celebration of savagery. And it is also true that; 'Hate and animosity cannot so easily change into love and sympathy. They can only change into ridicule and scorn.' Next listener shared his deed and told;

It's all a matter of luck...we caught a baagri in the lane...she was begging us not to kill her.

All the seven of you can have me, she pleaded. Do with me what you like but don't kill me.

So?

So what? Aziz plunged his knife into her breast.(Sahni, 2008)

It seemed like there were only kinds of animals that were moving around the streets; preys and predators. Innocent, weak and poor were being the prey of the savages. It was looking like the only good human being is a dead one.

### **3.8. Religion:**

Partition is the tale of the human spirit that is wondering in the Tamas (darkness) for its Moksha (renunciation). It is inconsiderable thought which religion could set it free from this hell. Which religion is good? Which religion is bad? The whole nation had divided into two parts; from the first day we have been fighting the wrong enemy; our common enemy is religion which dictates upon us division and partition. What was the need of this bloodshed? The bloodshed brought by religion. Alfred North Whitehead states on this; 'Religion is the last refuge of human savagery.'(Whitehead, 1999)

### **3.9. Thirst of Blood:**

Partition demands only blood, a blind thirst conveying the grotesque atmosphere prevailing at the time when the innocent man is getting slaughtered like chicken and the woman is getting raped like a habit. The pertaining thirst of Indians by a spectre. The Indians are an irascible lot and highly volatile and individualistic, ready to shed blood in the name of religion, and the pertaining thirst of the spectator by another spectre, so many villages have been burnt down. Now what more remains for you to do? And the thirst of the blood of ruler that is not in the mood to stop these Hunger Games, however listing of an unstoppable requesting; 'the government should take effective steps to bring the situation unless control...or...or vultures will fly over the city.'(Sahni, 2008)

### **4. Conclusion:**

To conclude we can say that Tamas has the daunting flavor of partition which provides with humanistic reading of the novel. The thematic overturned and linguistic

expressions make it a complete emotional but realistic study of the times of partition. The Hindu-Muslim communal harmony or disharmony is projected vividly by the depiction of various characters. All these features make it one of the best commentaries on the partition.

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