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Managing Editor  
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[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

[galaxyimrj@gmail.com](mailto:galaxyimrj@gmail.com)

## **Tamas: A Tale of Humanity and Sacrifice during Partition by Bhisham Sahni**

**Deler Singh**

Jaypee University of Information Technology  
Waknaghat, Solan  
Himachal Pradesh, India Pin: 173234

Partition of India and Pakistan, an event that jolted almost every Indian, is the theme for many Indian English Writers. The authors who have touched upon the issue have treated every theme regarding the event in their works. For example, Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) and Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Shadow From Ladakh* (1966) portray not only the violence caused by partition but also examine the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence. Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* give a new definition to patriotism and nationalism. Having stayed away from India for quite some time, these writers comment on Indian history with objectivity.

Apart from the violence and the communal frenzy that most of the partition novels record, another issues that finds a very subtle place in these writings is the love and loyalty that transcends above any religious or communal divide. At the time when people were indiscriminately killing every person who belonged to minority, there still were people who did not snap their ties with their old mates. No doubt violence and hatred fill the pages of these works, but the emotions of love and sacrifice, even for the strangers, leave an indelible mark on our heart and psyche. The realization that these works are based upon the real events further strengthens our faith in the goodness and humanity. The paper deals with Bhisham Sahani's novel *Tamas*. In the novel, we come across various scenes of violence which show the extent up to which a person can go during communal riots. But at the same time we meet various characters who transcend every religious and moral restriction to save those in distress. The paper tries to bring forward how some people even at this time when the survival was the most important thing for everyone; don't hesitate to risk their own lives in saving the people belonging to different religion.

Partition of India and Pakistan, an event that jolted almost every Indian, is the theme for many Indian English Writers. The authors who have touched upon the issue have treated every theme regarding the event in their works. For example Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) and Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Shadow From Ladakh* (1966) portray not only the violence caused by partition but also examine the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence. Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* give a new definition to patriotism and nationalism in their works. Having stayed away from India for quite some time, these writers comment on Indian history with objectivity.

Most of the writers who have taken up the theme have tried to describe the violence and killings that took place at the time on both the sides of the border. The trauma that followed the event also found the place in many literary pieces. While recording the sensitive events which made the masses suffer, the writers though tried to take an objective approach, without taking sides. Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* is considered the most objective response to the partition of India. *Tamas* is a powerful novel written on the partition, which looks at "chaos preceding the slitting

of the subcontinent in a small town in the North West Frontier province (now in Pakistan)”(Warrier 335).

Apart from the violence and the communal frenzy that most of the partition novels record, another issues that finds a very subtle place in these writings is the love and loyalty that transcends above all religious or communal divide. At the time when people were indiscriminately killing every person who belonged to minority, there still were people who did not snap their ties with their old mates. They could not understand the change in the allegiances and the love that occurred overnight and divided people who had lived together forever. They refused to consider them their enemies and went up to the extent of even sacrificing their own lives while saving others’. No doubt violence and hatred fill the pages of these works, but the emotions of love and sacrifice, even for the strangers, leave an indelible mark on our heart and psyche. The realization that these works are based upon the real events further strengthens our faith in the goodness and humanity. The paper deals with Bhisham Sahani’s novel *Tamas*. In the novel, we come across various scenes of violence which show the extent up to which a person can go during communal riots. But at the same time we meet various characters who transcend every religious and moral restriction to save those in distress. The paper tries to bring forward how some people even at this time when the survival was the most important thing for everyone; don’t hesitate to risk their own lives in saving the people belonging to different religions.

The partition of India and Pakistan led to such gruesome events that now even the name ‘partition’ brings to mind the pictures of killings, riots, rapes, dislocation, hunger, etc. The nation that was struggling for decades to free itself from the colonial rule could not accommodate people from different religions within a single boundary when it got independent. Commenting upon the atmosphere of the time, Natarajan and Nelson say:

Independence was accompanied by the tragedy of the subcontinent’s partition into India and Pakistan. Because of the violence that accompanied this geographical division, freedom generated rather mixed feelings. The euphoria of partition soon changed into a mood of gloom as millions of people on both sides of the border were traumatized by the frenzy of communalism, alienation and despair (Natarajan and Nelson 146).

*Tamas* by Bhisham Sahni records the partition and the violence that it brings with it. During this unfortunate event, people had to lose their houses and people with whom they had always lived. Women were raped and small children were rendered helpless. Even the old people were not spared and killed mercilessly. So many women in order to save their honor, along with their daughters had committed suicide. Though the people had an inkling of the partition and the migration but everything happened so quickly and in such confusion that people could not understand anything. When the killings started, people had no other option but to run and save their lives. Romesh Chopra, while writing about the incidents during the partition, says:

Riots had spread like wild fire, especially in Punjab, U.P., Bihar and Bengal. When Mountbatten took over, law and order had already broken down in many states, but got awful momentum during the Muslim Leagues campaign, in August, 1946 in the city of Calcutta...Anybody could murder anyone. No FIRs, no court cases, no police investigation took place, and of course it had the religious sanction (Chopra 913).

But in *Tamas*, Bhisham Sahni makes us meet with certain women who served as source of strength, courage, motivation and humane values. Through their altruistic behavior even towards the strangers, they, in spite of the violence and the bloodshed going around, reinstated the values of humanity and love in people. A similar incident may be seen in *Train to Pakistan*, where we meet Juggat Singh who sacrifices his own life for the people who considered him a criminal. It was his love for a Muslim girl which makes him take this step, rising above the barriers of religion. In spite of his a bad name and reputation in the society, he truly imbibes the philosophy of “Granth Sahib” which says:

For God is True and dispenseth Truth.

There the elect his court adorn,

And God Himself their actions honors (Singh 183).

Owing to the concepts of honour and shame, women are very vulnerable to sufferings and trauma during the events such as war, riots and communal clashes. The people associate raping of women with their victory over the opposing groups. Rape and abduction have always been common practices during such difficult times. In the novel *Tamas*, we see a woman who is gang raped by ten Muslim men. She dies during the act but in spite of knowing this, they continued satisfying their lust. Another similar incident narrates the story of a low caste ‘*bagri*’ woman who was raped and then killed. Many women were kidnapped and forcefully married by some men. Allah Rakha was one such man who had done the same thing with Parkasho.

Although amid all this chaos and bloodshed, when people had forgotten the words such as ‘humanity’ and ‘morals’, when the only and most important concern of the people was survival, there still existed some people who maintained their humanity. Rajo was one of them. She was a Muslim woman who forgets every so called code of conduct during the riots while saving the life of a Hindu couple. While she gives shelter to Harnam Singh and Banto, a Sikh couple, she does not think of their religion. She holds humanity supreme while forgetting everything else.

At the time of the carnage of the partition, people killed those who did not belong to their religion but still there were people who saved the lives of the people rising above such limitations. In India as well as Pakistan, there are instances where people did their best to save people from getting killed. Describing the similar kind of incidents, Romesh Chopra in his book *Love Is The Ultimate Winner* says:

Of course, there were many instances when people saved the lives of those who belonged to other than their own religion. At times it was with great imminent danger to one’s own life. Many true God fearing Muslims save the lives of their Hindu brethren, but they could not do much for the Sikhs, because they were conspicuous by their appearance. Likewise Hindus and Sikhs also saved the life of their Muslim friends.(Chopra 9014)

In the novel *Tamas*, we see that Harnam Singh and Banto had lost all their hopes for survival and werewandering aimlessly when they knocked at the door of Rajo. Rajo gave

them shelter and food and helped them hide safely there. She even helped them escape. She handed back Harnam Singh's gun and Banto's jewellery which had been looted by her husband and son. When her daughter-in-law Akran, who may be considered a victim of patriarchal social system, questions Rajo's actions out of apprehension, Rajo replies: 'I shall answer them myself... Shall I push out a person who has come seeking shelter? Everyone has to go into God's presence one day' (Sahani258). Here religion cuts across all barriers to be more humane and compassionate.

Therefore we see that while partition destroyed many lives on both the sides of the border, it could not kill the basic goodness and humanity from the hearts of many people. While some people were busy breaking the bonds that existed between them, there still existed people who risked their own lives to save innocent people. It is not only these fictional characters who commit such supreme acts of self sacrifice. There are evidences that even during the actual incident, there were people ready to give up their lives in order to save others'. If we try to find out the reasons for the partition of Indian and Pakistan, it is difficult to reach upon a conclusion that may seem pertinent enough. The logic of division on the basis of religion also does not hold grounds as there was a large number of Muslims who were left behind in India even after the partition. The only reality that remains indisputable is that the event took place in such a hurry that nobody could understand anything. People did not have time to think about where to go and what to take with them while leaving their lifelong assets. Resultantly, countless people died. There were only a handful of people like Rajo, who during this chaos could stay sane and retain their humanity within them.

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