

A Comparative Study of *Train to Pakistan* and *Tamas* as Partition Novels

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Abstract

The fictional representation of Partition has been popular theme in literature of different languages. This paper attempts to analyze two Partition novels in two different languages English and Hindi: Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh and Tamas by Bhisham Sahni. Tamas basically concentrates on partisan politics of extremists during the maelstrom of Partition. Train to Pakistan succeeds in catching the attention of readers by expressing the tragic splendor of a man's sacrifice for his Muslim beloved. Tamas focuses more on the dark side of Partition whereas Train to Pakistan celebrates the victory of love over hatred. The comparative study of these two novels reflects that the treatment of theme is different but both of the novels present the pangs of Partition. It also expresses human goodness in the midst of carnage.

Keywords:

Partition, partisan politics, communal hatred, massive violence, harrowing experiences, migration, love and longing.

All we have gained then by our belief

Is a life of doubt diversified by faith,

For one of faith diversified by doubt :

We called the chess-board white-we call it black.

(Bishop Blougram's Apology by Robert Browning)

The narrative of colossal human tragedy during Partition in Indian subcontinent is increasingly popular in the literature of twentieth century. Partition novels have covered a wide range of literary works in different languages like Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and English. The cataclysmic event stirred many creative minds in India and Pakistan to write stories and novels and to make movies on it. At the time of Partition massive violence and slaughter occurred on both sides: India and Pakistan:

Twelve million people were displaced as a result of Partition. Nearly one million died. Some 75,000 women were raped, kidnapped, abducted, forcibly, impregnated by men of the 'other' religion, thousands of families were split apart, homes burnt down and destroyed, villages abandoned. (Butalia 44-45).

Even now, nearly sixty three years after Partition fictions and films are made to unfold trauma and pain of its victims. Most of the writers who have presented Partition as a main theme of their works, have gone

through the horrible experiences of Partition which inspired them to express their own perspective through the medium of writing.

The purpose of this paper is to unfold the different aspects of Partition by comparing two novels *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh and *Tamas* by Bhisham Sahni written in two different languages English and Hindi. Both Khushwant Singh and Bhisham Sahni are versatile personalities. They were born in different cities in Pakistan in the same year 1915. During Partition their families had to migrate to India. Harrowing experiences during migration changed their outlook towards life and caused expression of extreme sensibility in their literary works. *Train to Pakistan* and *Tamas* are outlet of this tragic experience. Khushwant Singh reminisces :

The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the commonman. But the division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country (...) I became an angry middle-aged man, who wanted to shout his disenchantment with the world ... I decided to try my hand at writing (Quoted in Raizada 162).

Train to Pakistan and *Tamas* were awarded Grove Indian Fiction Prize (1956) and Sahitya Akademi Award (1975) for their lively description of human tragedy. *Train to Pakistan* begins in the summer of 1947 which is very hot and dry. The opening scene has a significant description of the summer along with the harrowing description of massacre in Calcutta, Bengal and Bihar. Hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the Northwest Frontier abandoned their homes and migrated towards east for protection. On the way they encountered plunder, abduction, rape and violence. In the midst of brutal activities there were some villages which were still untouched by communal discrimination and hatred. Mano Majra is one of them which stands for humanity and hope in the midst of darkness.

Mano Majra is a village with mixed population of Muslims and Sikhs. In the whole village the only Hindu family is that of Lala Ram Lal, the money lender. The three buildings in the village Lala Ram Lal's house, Sikh temple and a mosque make a triangle of communal harmony. The railroad bridge plays a very prominent part in the novel. The story portrays simple peasants' life where people are unaware of recent political developments.

Like *Train to Pakistan*, Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* is one of the famous novels about the terrible events that took place during the Partition of the British India. *Tamas* (Darkness), the title of the novel is apt and suggestive because at this time carnage was at its peak. Unlike *Train to Pakistan*, *Tamas* unfolds the life of Urban people during the maelstrom of Partition. The main theme of the novel is that there are extremist elements in every community who create problems and social disturbance to achieve their political goal. *Tamas* starts with the slaughter of a pig by a bribed 'chamar', Nathu who is tempted by Murad Ali. Later the carcass is found on the steps of mosque and it becomes the real cause of trouble in the city. Before this terrible incident the town is full of communal harmony.

The place of entertainment later becomes the centre of political meetings primarily of the Muslim League. The slogans of 'Pakistan Zindabad' and 'Qaid-e-Azam-Zindabad' can be heard at every moment. The prominent political party 'Congress' is criticised by the followers of Muslim League and the Hindus. Turkish cap says :

It is the chicanery of the Hindus the incontrovertible truth is that the Congress is the body of the Hindus, and the Muslim League of the Muslims. The Congress can not speak for the Muslims. (Tamas 34).

Hindus also suspect Congress because they think that the Muslim Members in Congress are spy of the Muslim League. Mehta says :

I told you to throw out Latif from the Congress organization. I can give you in writing that he has links with the CID you would go on feeding the snake in the grass. Then there is Mubarak Ali. He is always hobnobbing with the League fellows (Tamas 103-104).

So the position of the Congress becomes too weak to maintain communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims. On the contrary in Train to Pakistan the peace of the village is disturbed due to the murder of Lala Ram Lal by Mali and his gang, the dacoits. Jugga is arrested by mistake because he was out on that night and belongs to a dacoit's family. The three incidents - the murder of Lala Ram Lal, love making scene between Jugga and Nooran, and the Deputy Commissioner, Hukum Chand's spending night with a prostitute, Haseena take place at the same time. On the following day of the murder Iqbal, an activist of the communist party, arrives in the village seeking right place to prove himself as a hero. His name creates confusion regarding his religion. None in the village is sure that he is a Sikh. He is mistaken as a member of Muslim League and arrested on suspicion. Train to Pakistan portrays simple peasants' life whereas Tamas describes political trickery and dangerous activities by different communal grounds like Muslim League, Hindu Organization and Akali Dal.

The mischief is done by a Muslim, Mubarak Ali but the Muslims suspect that the Hindus want to desecrate their religious place. Muslims start throwing stones in anger. The slaughter of a pig on the steps of mosque becomes threat to the life of many innocent cows. The mosque incident becomes centre of discussion everywhere and each community becomes alert and prepared for sudden attack :

Every householder must immediately store in his house, canister of linseed oil and a bag of coke and charcoal. Boiling oil can be poured over the enemy from the roof - top, red - hot coals can be flung ... (Tamas 74).

The alarm bell is installed on the Shivala temple to make Hindus alert. The mosque mischief leads to many murders in the town. A deputation of Muslim League and a deputation of Congressmen go to meet Richard, the Deputy Commissioner but it is of no avail. Bakshiji, one of the congressmen suggests that the police should patrol the city and army pickets should be set up at different places to prevent riots. But all his proposals are rejected by Richard on one or the other ground. In place of maintaining peace he keeps on playing divide and rule policy. In contrast to Richard, Hukum Chand in Train to Pakistan who at first

appears as a typical Indian representative of bureaucracy in British governed India, is later on moved by horrible scene of corpses on the platform. Richard being a Britisher, doesn't feel sympathy for Indians and their troubles. Liza tells him, *'You can stop them from fighting, Richard. After all they are from the same racial stock. Didn't you say so (Tamas 50-51)?'* But Richard retorts, *'Darling rulers have their eyes only on differences that divide their subjects, not on what unites them (51).'*

His irresponsible attitude makes the situation worse. The youngsters are misguided by their masters. Master Dev Vratt, the organizer of the Youth Wing's Akhara incites Ranvir and encourages his violent instinct. Muslims are described as 'Mlechas'. He teaches him the technique to make a bomb. Youngsters are trained in making poisoned arrows, fire arrows, poison gas. Ranvir turns into a menacing boy. At first he is unable to slaughter a hen successfully but later on, killing someone becomes very easy for him :

Killing is not difficult ... I could have killed this man easily. One has only to raise one's hand and it is done.... To stab a man to death is far easier. It poses no problem, killing poses no problem (Tamas 90).

He hits Dharmendar halwai and takes away the cauldron for boiling oil. Suddenly the riot breaks out in the city with the murder of a Hindu on the other side of the bridge. Then it takes the form of an unending process of one murder after another in different localities. The politicians are opportunists. They fight among themselves but in times of danger, they come together to ensure their own safety. Peace committee is difficult to be formed in such a grave situation. Grain market is set afire and seventeen shops are reduced to ashes. The religious places become centres for making strategies for communal war.

The alarm bell is rung and it reminds one of the tragic riots in 1926 between Hindus and Muslims. Most of the young boys gather at Masterji's house leaving their own houses unsafe. Neighbours assurance for safety looks empty promises. Everyone is gripped with fear and suspicion. No Muslim now dares to go into a Hindu locality and vice-versa. Most of the pieces of information which inflame riots are just rumours.

The attackers hide themselves and attack suddenly the people. Roads look deserted and shops remain closed. Inder, one of the boys in Ranvir's group stabs a pedlar who sells oil and scents. The man gets shocked since an innocent looking boy has attacked him.

A little later riot has broken out in Ratta. The age-old rivalry becomes alive again. Against the Gurudwara Sheikh Gulam Rasu's double storeyed house has been converted into a fortress by the Musalman: *'Here too, the eyes were bloodshot and hearts afire with the spirit of sacrifice (Tamas 232).'* A bitter fight takes place between Sikhs, gathered in Gurudwara and Muslims. The battle goes on for two days and two nights. Seven Sikhs are killed. Two dead bodies lie unclaimed. The village is converted into a terrible site of horror. People are killed including both Hindus and Muslims. The peace makers Sohan Singh and Mir Dad are mistreated and thrown out from their communities. Later Sohan Singh's dead body is found unclaimed. The negotiation remains unsuccessful. When marauders enter the village most of the women jump into the well

along with their children :

... there was not a single woman left in the Gurudwara. The air was filled with the heart - rending cries of women and children coming from inside the well and were mingled with the loud shouts of 'Allah-o-Akbar' and 'Sat Sri Akal' (Tamas 293-294).

In a state of bewilderment people are ready to kill anyone to protect their faith. When Baldev Singh realizes he can not save his mother, he plunges his sword into the chest of the old black smith, the only person whom he is able to get, thereby avenging his mother's murder. The ammunition in the Gurudwara at last gets exhausted. There is nothing left to fight with and fight for.

In Dhok Ilahi, Harnam Singh's shop and house are set afire. His daughter, Jasbir has already sacrificed her life by jumping into the well. Sixty-years-old Harnam Singh has to leave his home at night with his wife. They take shelter in the house of the very Ehsan Ali who was involved in looting and burning their house and shop with his son, Ramzan. His condition looks pitiable when out of fatigue, agitation and suppressed emotions he begins to cry bitterly like a child. His son Iqbal can not bear torments and accepts to convert to Islam. He encounters vulgar jokes. He is tortured and kicked by Ramzan's group and humiliated before the whole village. In his conversion ceremony he is surrounded by a big crowd where his hair is tied into tufts with the help of horse-dung and urine. Moreover Nur Din forces open his mouth and drops a big piece of raw meat, dripped with blood into his mouth. He is also circumcised to complete conversion ceremony. The narrator remarks:

Hostility and hatred cannot turn into sympathy and love so suddenly, they can only turn into crude banter. (Tamas 278).

Tamas describes a series of harrowing incidents. But in Train to Pakistan not a single murder takes place in Mano Majra except that of Lala Ram Lal. No riot breaks out and no woman is killed or raped. Train symbolizes both liveliness of life and deathly silence. The title of the novel Train to Pakistan seems an anticipation of the terrible future event. At first it acts as a means to transfer refugees from India to Pakistan and vise-versa. Later it is used to transfer corpses. The trains are halted and the passengers are mercilessly slaughtered without any discrimination of women and children.

The novel mainly depicts three horrible incidents. The first one is the arrival of ghost train at Mano Majra railway station, from Pakistan. It is full of the dead bodies of Sikh refugees. The peace loving people of Mano Majra who can not think of a murder of a co-villager, are panicked to see destruction and death in large numbers. The wood and kerosene oil are collected from the villagers to burn the dead bodies. The burning dead bodies leave the villagers stunned and speechless :

Red tongues of flame leaped into the black sky. A soft breeze began to blow towards the village. It brought the smell of burning kerosene, then of wood. And then - a faint acrid smell of searing flesh. (T.to P. 100).

The arrival of another ghost train makes the situation worse. This time there comes no demand of oil and wood from people. The corpses are buried with the help of bulldozer. The swelling Sutlej with hundreds of

corpses afloat presents the second terrible site :

The sky was soon full of kites and vultures. They flew down and landed on the floating carcasses. They pecked till the corpses themselves rolled over and shooed them off with hands which rose stiffly into the air and splashed into the water (T.to P. 164).

The third is two unfortunate stories brought into the novel through the consciousness of Hukum Chand - the story of newly married Sundari and the story of Sunder Singh. In the first story the Sikhs are singled out and hacked to death and Sundari becomes victim of repeated rape by one man after another:

The clean-shaven were stripped. Those that were circumcised were forgiven. Those that were not, were circumcised... she who had not really had a look at Mansa Ram was shown here husband completely naked. They held him by the arms and legs and one man cut off his penis and gave it to her. The mob made love to her (T. to P. 203).

On the other hand Sunder Singh kills his three children and his wife because the train has been held up at a station for four days and there is no hope of water and food:

Sunder Singh's children cried for water and food. So did everyone else. Sunder Singh gave them his urine to drink. Then that dried up too. So he pulled out his revolver and shot them all (T.to P. 203-204).

The arrival of Sikh soldiers with machine guns causes commotion in Mano Majara. Gradually the villagers start realizing the effect of Partition. The influx of refugees and the rumours of rape and desecration of mosque fill them with the feeling of revenge. The older generation gets worried about the safety of their Muslim friends. But none of them dares to ask them to leave the village. The situation gets more fearful when a teen-aged young man comes from outside and succeeds in injecting the sense of retaliation and enmity in the hearts of the young Mano Majarans :

For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two. For each home they loot, loot two. For each train load of dead they send over, send two across. For each road convoy that is attacked, attack two. That will stop the killing on the other side. It will teach them that we can also play this game of killing and looting (T.to P. 171).

They hatch a plan to attack the refugee train to Pakistan. Mali and his gang join hands with the youths of Mano Majra in the conspiracy. Tamas gives the story of town where people are acutely aware of religious differences. Different communal groups and factions fight one another for their vested interests. Due to their nefarious designs the city is plunged into disastrous riots. On the contrary Train to Pakistan presents the story of a united village getting divided after the arrival of outsiders in the village. The ending of the both of the novels is significant. In Train to Pakistan Hukum Chand's wise and crucial decision saves the life of thousands of Muslim refugees who are on their way to Pakistan. He releases both Jugga and Iqbal in hope that their consciousness will stir them to prevent the disaster and save the life of Muslims. Iqbal goes to gurudwara not to save the refugees on train but to save his own life. Quite pragmatically he muses, *'When the bullets fly about, what is the point of sticking out your head and getting shot? The bullet is neutral'* (T to P. 194).

On the contrary Jugga who is known as a bad character goes to gurudwara before going to lay down his life. His immediate concern is

the life of Nooran who is supposed to be on board. He cuts the rope tied to the bridge with his kirpan and succeeds in averting the disaster but fails in saving his own life:

There was a volley of shots. The man shivered and collapsed. The rope snapped in the centre as he fell. The train went over him, and went on to Pakistan (T. to P. 207).

The sacrifice of Jugga comes as a surprise and proves that humanity can not be defeated by hatred and evils. The transformation in the characters of Jugga and Hukum Chand is very significant. Hukum Chand's physical love for Haseena turns into genuine love. He finds an image of his daughter in her.

In Tamas Sohan Singh and Jarnail sacrifice their life to make peace among different communities but their position is not exalted to such an extent. They remain unsuccessful in their efforts and many murders take place. At last when Richard takes action to control the situation there is left very little to save :

Dead bodies lying here and there, added to the gloom and sense of desolation all around ...The marauders had left the village, carrying all the booty they could (Tamas 295).

Seeing the arrangement Kishan Singh filled with depression and relief, at the same time he shouts, '*Had you come a couple of days earlier, we would not have suffered so. But it is still OK Sahib!*' (Tamas 297).'

Train to Pakistan ends on a note of optimism. The conspirators fail in destroying the basic human virtues and values. Love triumphs over hatred. In Tamas conspirator Murad Ali succeeds in his evil design. The politicians once again get involved in their new game of electoral politics and winning seats and forget about the loss people have incurred. The instigators of the riots become peace makers:

On the seat next to that of the driver sat a man, holding a microphone in his hand. Many did not recognize him, but some did. Nathu was dead, or he would have recognized him at once. It was Murad Ali (Tamas 350).

Bakshiji aptly remarks in future reference, '*Kites shall hover, kites and vultures shall continue to hover for long...*' (Tamas 351).'

Although Tamas ends with an indication that the destructive elements will always be present in society yet some of the incidents give relief and reflect human goodness. Bakshiji in Tamas like Meet Singh in Train to Pakistan makes all efforts to prevent disturbance. He removes carcass from the steps of mosque to lessen the tension. But he is also as helpless as Bhai Meet Singh. The Shivala market like Keekar tree in Train to Pakistan stands for communal harmony. Shah Nawaz also symbolizes communal amity. He safely evacuates laxmi Narain's family who is not very intimate to him. His concern for Raghu Nath's family is very moving. But he cannot control himself when he encounters the funeral procession of Muslims' that have been slaughtered by Hindus. He gives a sharp kick to Milkhi, Raghunath's servant in disgust. Ehsan Ali's wife also represents human goodness. She gives shelter to Harnam Singh and his wife against the will of her family members. Even her son, Ramzan finds himself unable to kill them :

Twice Ramzan raised his pickaxe to strike, but both times he let it fall.

It is one thing to kill a kafir, it is quite another to kill someone you know and who has sought shelter in your house. A thin line was still there which was difficult to cross, despite the fact that the atmosphere was charged with religious frenzy and hatred (Tamas 269).

Love, virtues and values can not be completely destroyed by hatred. The hope of humanity will always shine in society even in the midst of 'Tamas'. This hope has been presented in Tamas through the growing love between Parkasho and Allah Rakha, her abductor. It shows that communal differences can not stop a person to conceive love for another person for long. The same message is also given by Train to Pakistan where he love of Jugga and Nooran cuts across caste and religious barriers. Mushirul Hasan aptly states :

It [Literature] also sprouts a countervailing protest, a voice of justice that must be the surging of our humanity itself - something greater than our bestiality - within us (393).

Both the novels blame Jinnah's two-nation theory, Britishers divide and rule policy, political intrigue and failure of Congress in maintaining peace, as a factors responsible for terrible event of Partition. The role of women is almost absent from the both the novels.

The theme of Partition has been reflected in literature of different languages with different perspectives. The study of these two novels reveals that the portrayal of situation may be different in Partition novels but all of them picture both the aspects of Partition : the bestial as well as the human. In Indian English Partition novels we find the continuity of life and the sense of hope at the end. But in the Hindi Partition literature focus is more on the dark side of the Partition i.e. depression, anger and communal aggression. Ritu Menon states :

Popular sentiment and perception, at least as reflected in Partition literature particularly in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, almost without exception registered the fact of Partition with despair or anger and profound unhappiness (07).

Tamas basically concentrates on high politics and complexities of Indian society during Partition. Train to Pakistan succeeds in catching the attention of readers by expressing the tragic splendour of a man's sacrifice for his Muslim beloved. Both of the novels are acclaimed as a masterpiece for their extreme sensitivity in narration and special naturalistic mores.

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