

## **Delineation of the Psychological Trauma of Women in Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas***

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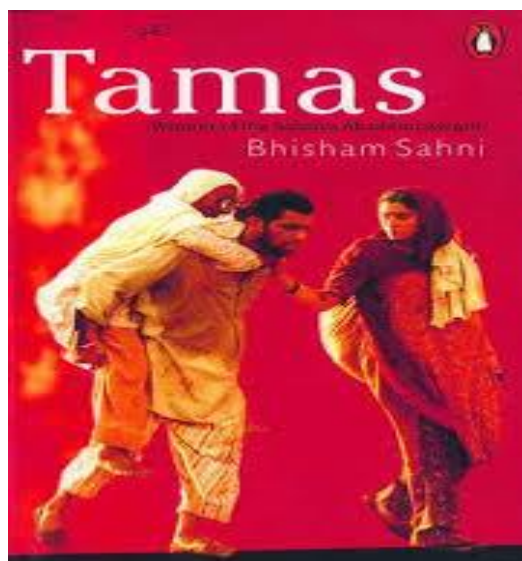
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### **Abstract**

*The Partition of the British India was accompanied by the creation of two Independent countries- India and Pakistan. The consequences of Partition were unanticipated and it still continues to haunt the psyche of people living in the borders. Millions of people lost their life, number of refugees was created on both sides, many lost their relatives, and many were wounded. Women and children were the most affected lot. Women were abducted, raped, and even mutilated and killed. Many writers had tried to depict the sufferings of women during the time of Partition. The purpose of this study was to study how Bhisham Sahni portrayed women in his famous work *Tamas*. He portrayed the mental and physical trauma and also their struggle to exist in their native soil.*

**Key Words:** *Partition, trauma, sufferings, compassion*



The political Partition of India in the year 1947 brought about the formation of two new countries India and Pakistan. The Indians viewed the Partition as the grim side of Independence while the Pakistanis commended the Independence they had achieved. The threatening vibe which was brought out by the Partition between the two nations had influenced individuals of all strata independent of gender, caste, creed and status. The individuals of both the nations yearned for a free existence without the dread of slaughter and savagery.

The Partition of the country unleashed startling viciousness and carnage in the nation and the most exceedingly awful sufferers were the women and the children. Women endured ferocity of its utmost forms like abduction, rape, and forced marriages. They were considered to be the symbols of their families, communities, and nations. They had to endure a great deal as the members of the other religious groups considered them as a tool against the men folk. Many were taken as hostages and many had to commit suicide in order to escape from the sexual brutality:

Familiar forms of sexual violence were now charged with symbolic meaning and used not only to violate female bodies 'belonging' to the other community, but also as representations of territory that could be conquered and dishonored. Consequently, women's bodies were inscribed with religious iconography and nationalist slogans-'Pakistan Zindabad' and 'Jai Hind'. (Roy 78-79)

Women were attacked at all levels by homicide, abduction and forcible conversions. Opponent communities targeted women to disgrace them and many were abducted and sold. Many men in power tried to avert the cruelties against women. But many others misused their places of authority:

Women, as Gandhi described them in the context of the Partition, were the 'chief sufferers' as they faced violence from men of other communities, their own family members, and their nations. Partition-related brutality targeting women and children brought violence within the domestic sphere for the first time. Around 75,000 women belonging to different communities were abducted and raped by men belonging to another community (and sometimes their own). Sometimes, women had their breasts cut off, their genitalia mutilated, and were branded with symbols of the other community. They were sometimes paraded naked as a show of power for the perpetrators and to shame their community. Such violence sought to mark women's bodies as representations of their community and family honour. (Roy 78)

It is estimated that around 75000 women were kidnapped and raped. Pitilessness upon women was executed on a planned basis. Both the countries, India and Pakistan subsequently took endeavors to repatriate the abducted women. The Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan in September 1947, pledged not to consider the forced marriages as legal. Both nations endorsed this agreement thus by attempted to establish harmony in the countries.

Various forms of literary pieces represent the horrific experience of women during Partition. Numerous ingenious writers endeavored to portray the terrible sufferings of the women during Partition. Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003) was one such writer who wrote about the physical and mental trauma experienced by women during Partition. Sahni was a recognized Hindi fiction writer, dramatist, interpreter, and instructor, was born in Sialkot. After Partition, he and his family had to move to Amritsar. Sahni had his education in Lahore and in Amritsar. He became the beneficiary of Padma Bhushan for Literature in 1998 and Sahitya Akademi Fellowship in 2002. Universal Humanism, compassion for fellow beings etc became the subject of his works. His most celebrated work, *Tamas* received the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award and Uttar Pradesh Government Award in 1975. *Tamas*, which is episodic in structure, was initially written in Hindi and was later translated into English and many other regional languages including, Malayalam, Gujarati, Kashmiri etc. It was also adapted into a tele-serial of the same title by Govind Nihalani.

*Tamas* (Darkness) portrayed the strength and compassion of various women characters and their endeavor to exist in the society. The novel was about the uprising, the author himself had witnessed after the Partition of 1947. The writer interlaced facts and fiction and portrayed the appalling brutality of four days experienced by the people. Set in a small town frontier, the novel relates how an uneducated sweeper, Nathu was exploited by a politician named Murad Ali. Nathu was bribed by Murad Ali to slaughter a pig by persuading him that it was for a veterinarian. Nathu accepted it and did it as he had no doubts about Murad Ali. But what happened after that was startling for Nathu. The next morning, the carcass of the pig was discovered on a mosque's steps. The city which was already in a strained circumstance detonated and the exasperated Muslims strike back by killing a cow.

The city became crammed with dead bodies within a short span of time. People ignored the law and order and they killed people of their opposite religious groups. Finally, the British administrators beckoned the army to maintain a strategic distance from further carnage in the city and were somehow able to stop massive killing. But they couldn't wipe out the alarming reminiscences that the people had in their mind after this ghastly occurrence. The different communities who once lived together amicably couldn't trust each other again as they have lost all kind of convictions and they even doubt their very own shadows.

In *Tamas*, Sahni discussed how women were increasingly vulnerable to distress and exploitation during Partition. It very well may be found at its extreme when they were abducted and assaulted. There were numerous occurrences in the novel where women were molested brutally. A disastrous episode was portrayed by the writer, where a Hindu lady was assaulted by ten Muslim men. She died in the course of events yet they continue to rape her. Men belonging to one religious group ill-treat the women of other religious group as to hurt their emotions. They did all these brutalities and described it to other members without any shame and hesitation. There are various illustrations of plunder and rape and men even did not vacillate to gloat over their wrongdoings. Allah Rakha, a character in *Tamas* had kidnapped Parkasho, performed some sort of nikah rites and married her without her assent. All these are instances which show how insecure were women those days.

Bhisham Sahni had concentrated on the anguish, sufferings and humiliation of women during Partition in his novel, *Tamas*. He conferred about the abduction, assault and furthermore of the recovery of such young girls by state offices. All these talk about the appalling encounters of the women who were victimized in this holocaust. The author attempted to concentrate on the women who were the most exceedingly terrible sufferers of the holocaust. Sahni presented women as the ultimate sufferers and at the same time he concentrated on the resilience and the adaptability of women during adverse circumstances.

Sahni depicted women as the encapsulation of solidarity and mental fortitude. He presented women as the bearers of positive qualities whose sympathy and caring demeanor contribute to the advancement of an amicable society. They indicated benevolent and relinquishing nature despite the fact that they were constantly abused and were marginalized. They were not permitted to grow up to their potential and were constantly restricted to the periphery. Their identity is always suppressed. Sahni depicted the sympathetic concern, sensitivity and compassion of women even for their enemies at crisis.

Liza is one of the characters in the novel who endures the insensitivity of man. Liza's husband Richard, the British Deputy Commissioner paid no notice to his wife's emotions. Liza was exposed to dejection and loneliness due to Richard's tumultuous schedule. The strained circumstance of the city also upset Liza very much, while Richard pretended to be unaware of the circumstance. She became even more distressed when Richard requested her to go along with him to Sayedpur. He was going there to get a disinfectant sprayed into the well where numerous women drowned themselves to escape from the agitators: 'Where do you want to take me for a drive, Richard? Will you take me for a drive through burning villages? I don't want to see anything. I don't want to go anywhere.' (Sahni 313) Liza was surprised at Richard's insensitiveness that he could sought for new kinds of birds and listen to their warbling even in such situation where women drowned themselves in order to protect themselves. She also understands the fact that it was the colonizer's strategy to make Indians fight for the sake of religion. She was sympathetic towards the Indians and has compassion towards them. It could be well understood from her conversation with Richard.

Harnam Singh and Banto was the only Sikh couple in their village. The Muslims were raging with anger to kill any Hindus and Sikhs they saw. So they escaped from their village and took shelter in a Muslim household. The Muslim woman who gave them shelter was Rajo. She was a kind hearted woman. She opened the door and let them get in. She gave them buttermilk to drink and conceal them from the men folk of the house as they were looking for the Hindus and Sikhs. She was sympathetic towards the suffering people and that was the motivation behind why she offered haven to the Sikh couple without the slightest hesitation about their religion.

Rajo's son and her daughter- in-law were against offering shelter to them. But Rajo was so empathetic and sensitive that she discarded all their protests: "Shall I push out a person who has come seeking shelter? Everyone has to go into God's presence

one day” (258). She handed over Banto’s jewellery which had been plundered by her husband and other Muslims and send them safely from her home. The author was unmistakably giving a message through Rajo that human beings must be of higher priority than religion. Here Sahni glorifies women who could think over religion and can be empathetic to their fellow beings. They are considered to be weak and fragile, but the strength of the women to be pure in heart should be appreciated.

Banto was a strong support for her husband, Harnam Singh. She always stood with him and accompanied him to a safer location from their village. Her trust upon her husband and her strong will helped her to follow her husband. She knew that their journey will be very tough. But she accompanied her husband, but was always thoughtful about her son and daughter. They got shelter in the household of the Muslim woman, Rajo. At first she hesitated to accept buttermilk from a Muslim lady. But later she felt embarrassed of her thoughts and break into tears when Rajo asked her to take utensils if they had any with them.

Another significant woman character in the novel is Nathu's wife. She was a woman who was bestowed with boundless persistence. She shared a good relationship with her neighbors. She was a lady who could realize the mental thoughts and conflicts of her husband. She was a real strength for Nathu and he could share his anxieties with her. She was able to console him when he disclosed how he was swindled by Murad Ali. Nathu felt relieved, when he unveiled his psychological conflicts with her. She was a God fearing lady who was contented with what he had. Nathu became maddened when he heard of the uproars in his place. But his wife was able to alleviate him even at that juncture. But she also understood that everything had turned to an unforeseen circumstance where nobody could get away.

The consistent dread of every woman at that time would be of the sexual viciousness they would have to confront if caught by the opposite religious groups. Women were objectified and by disrespecting them, it was the community that was offended. Sahni justified the fear of women of that time through the novel. Jasbir, the daughter of Harnam Singh and Banto, and other Sikh women found shelter in the Gurdwara when the city was in riots. However, when they knew about their approaching danger of sexual savagery at the hands of the Muslim men, with no qualm, they ended it all. The women of Thoa Khalsa committed mass suicide by drowning themselves in a well. In reality, the frenzy that they had of getting molested by Muslim men persuaded them to commit such a shocking deed. They considered their purity of utmost importance. They accumulated strength by chanting Gurbani and bravely hop into the well when they had no choice left. Sahni presented those Sikh women as incarnations of determination, gallantry and sacrifice.

The partition and its devastating effect had strong impact upon the people. They fought against each other in the name of religion. People lost all their thinking ability and killed people of other religious groups mercilessly. In the novel, *Tamas*, Sahni portrayed the cruelties that the women had to endure during Partition. He depicted the women characters as the symbol of strength and compassion. He presented the women as supreme to men with their thoughts. They could think over religious barriers and could live harmoniously in the society.

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