
**TEXT, REPRESENTATION AND REVISION: RE-VISIONING PARTITION VIOLENCE IN
KHUSHWANT SINGH'S *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN* AND BHISHAM SAHNI'S *TAMAS***AFRINUL HAQUE KHAN
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Accepted: 24-12-2015**ABSTRACT**

Partition is a complex historical reality that continues to puzzle the minds of scholars, historians and imaginative writers. Ever since its occurrence, they have endeavored to comprehend the subtle nuances of the complex strands that shaped the making of this seminal event. Through a comparative analysis of Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Sahni's *Tamas*, the present study attempts to examine, how the profoundly sensitive and deeply perceptive imagination of both Singh and Sahni create texts which re-enact, with sheer clarity and force, the violent happenings of partition. Thus they enable the readers to re-vision the complexities involved, create awareness/consciousness in them regarding those historical blunders, the consequences of which are still borne by the people, and also urge them to revise/reform their beliefs, thinking and practices so that their present as well as future is safeguarded against such catastrophic events.

KEYWORDS: Partition; Violence; Text; Representation; Re-vision; Revision; *Train to Pakistan*; *Tamas*; Khushwant Singh; Bhisham Sahni

RESUMEN *Texto, representación y revisión: estudio sobre la violencia en el periodo de la partición en Tren a Pakistán de Khushwant Singh y Tamas de Bhisham Sahni*

La Partición es una realidad histórica compleja que continúa siendo un enigma para las mentes de eruditos, historiadores y escritores creativos, quienes desde su aparición se han empeñado en comprender a través de sus numerosos artículos y textos los ligeros matices dentro de los enfoques complejos que dieron lugar a este acontecimiento. Este estudio procura examinar, a través de la comparación de las novelas *Tren a Pakistán* de Singh y *Tamas* de Sahmi, de qué manera la imaginación altamente sensible y extremadamente perceptible de ambos autores da lugar a textos que promulgan, con plena claridad e ímpetu, los acontecimientos que dieron lugar a la Partición, haciendo posible a los lectores la revisión de las complejidades inherentes a los hechos, y creando en ellos un sentido de conciencia sobre los errores históricos, cuyas consecuencias todavía perviven, y urgen a reformar sus actitudes, pensamientos y prácticas, de forma que tanto su presente como su futuro queden a salvo de tan catastróficos eventos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Partición; violencia; texto; representación; revisión; *Train to Pakistan*; *Tamas*; Khushwant Singh; Bhisham Sahni

“...Arise, O friend of the distressed!

See the plight of your Punjab. Corpses lie strewn in the pastures and the Chenab has turned crimson.

Someone has poured poison into the waters of the five rivers and these waters are now irrigating the land with poison.” (Pritam, 1992: 946)

The sheer quantity of violence heaped by the twentieth century upon itself is enough to make even the most cheerful philosopher pessimistic. (Keane, 1996: 7)

In his book, *Remembering Partition* Gyanendra Pandey describes Partition as “a moment of rupture and genocidal violence, marking the termination of one regime and the inauguration of two new ones” (1). Indeed, no other event in Indian history has exerted a more pervasive and profound influence on the politics, policies and ideologies of the nation as well as the social, cultural and affective life of its people than the Partition of India, which accompanied independence in August 1947, driving millions to “painful and perilous migrations, and made hundreds of thousands suffer unspeakable agony and death” (Seervai, 2014: v). While the experience of Partition persists as an integral part of the Indian experience, the memories of Partition lie deep-rooted in the Indian consciousness, compelling historians and creative writers to produce texts which, armoured with their insightful observations and critical acumen, have added a new dimension to the seminal event, even though its full comprehension has remained both illusive and elusive till now. While several historians from across the world have attempted to document the causes and the continuing after-effects of this seminal event through their works, ‘it has been better conveyed’, say Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, “by the more sensitive creative writers and artists... than by historians” (2004:164). In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that ever since its occurrence, Indian writers, especially from the region of the Punjab, have repeatedly gone back to what Meenakshi Mukherjee calls “rupture [i.e. Partition] to understand our present”. (2004: 180)

It is important to note here that for the Punjabis, Partition was “a tragedy beyond the power of words to describe” (Nanda, 2003: 90). The bifurcation of the province of Punjab, necessitated by

the British decision to divide India in 1947, during the transfer of power, into Sikh and Hindu dominated East Punjab and Muslim majority West Punjab, unleashed unprecedented sectarian violence, communal frenzy and a brutal uprooting of the entire Hindu, Muslim and Sikh populations on both sides of the newly- created national borders. In his memoir, the eminent historian, B. R. Nanda, puts the figures, especially in the Punjab, at “an estimated loss of one and a half million lives and migration of nearly five million Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab to East Punjab and about the same number of Muslims from East Punjab to West Punjab across the newly-created border between India and Pakistan” (1). On the other hand, Ian Talbot notes that “huge caravans of refugees ... traversed this route as part of the mass exodus of 4.6 million Muslims from East Punjab and reverse migrations of West Punjab Hindus and Sikhs to India” (2006: xxxii). Needless to say then, the catastrophic experience of the autumn of 1947 deeply shattered the beliefs of intellectuals like Khushwant Singh and Bhisham Sahni, who felt distressed and disillusioned at the bestiality and savagery. Singh remarks in a guest talk in 1964:

The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were shattered... I had believed that we Indians were peace-loving and non- violent, that we were more concerned with the matters of the spirit. After the experience of the autumn of 1947, I could no longer subscribe to these views. I became an angry middle-aged man, who wanted to shout his disenchantment with the world. (Guest of Honour Talk)

Such were the memories and impressions of Partition in the canvas of his mind that even fifty one years after the event had occurred, Singh could not alter his stance and denounced it vehemently:

We must not forget the partition because it is relevant today. We must remember that it did in fact happen and can happen again. That is why I keep reminding people who clamour for an independent Kashmir, Khalistan or Nagaland to remember what happened to Muslims when some of them asked for a separate Muslim state... Reminding ourselves of what happened in 1947 and realizing the possibilities of its recurring, *we should resolve that we will never let it happen again.* (My italics) (*The Hindustan Times* 9)

The depression that thus plagued the writers who had witnessed the calamity from the epicenter could best be overcome by writing texts which spoke their minds, their perspectives. These texts, authored by writers with profoundly sensitive insights and a powerful comprehension of people, society and region, had the authenticity of the authors' experiences, which were inextricably wedded to their vision. My contention is that, through the representation of the truth and trauma of Partition, these texts create sites/spaces, wherein the reader, transformed into observer–

participant, witnesses the entire drama, and even though unable to effect any change in the course of the drama, perceives it with a fresh vision, comprehends the ambiguities involved in and/or leading to its occurrence, and eventually effects a change in his/her pre-conceived notions, beliefs, attitude and understanding of the historical truths. In other words, through a representation of the violent happenings of 1947, these texts endeavor to sensitize readers to those historical blunders, the consequences of which are still borne by the people.

Here, through a comparative analysis of Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Sahni's *Tamas*, I shall attempt to explore, how the narratives of partition enable readers to re-vision the subtleties involved in its occurrence, create awareness/consciousness in them regarding the horrendous deeds committed and ask them to revise their attitudes, thinking and practices so that their present as well as their future is safeguarded against such catastrophic events. What causes change in the pattern of communal relations? What leads to frenzy or associated states of temporary aberration or derangement during such a change in communal relations? Why do people in similar circumstances or under the same pressures behave differently? What were/are the implications of Partition for a multi-religious, pluralistic society like India, which after 1947, became more vulnerable to the conflicts and violence generated by the divisive forces? I shall examine these texts in relation to these and other questions.

Text and Representation

“The work of art”, says Henry James, “is not required to be an exact representation of life as seen through a lens: the novelist, or any other artist, is not like the man of science... The truth required lies in the fullness and perfection and the vivid sense of reality with which the artist transmits his personal views of life.” (in Baker, 1924: 44)

With deliberate care both Singh and Sahni select incidents that would best aid them in communicating with “fullness and perfection” the truth of Partition and also compel the people to think and reflect about the grievous errors committed. Written at a time when the wounds inflicted by Partition were still raw, *Train to Pakistan* captured, defined and established, for Indians, the true image of the traumatic event. In fact, the very opening of Singh's text provides a key to our understanding of the catastrophe:

The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers... Hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the Northwest Frontier... fled towards the protection of the predominantly Sikh and Hindu communities in the east... Along the way... they collided with panicky swarms of Muslims fleeing to safety in the west. The riots had become a rout... almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding. (Singh, 2009: 1-2)

The forthrightness and honesty of the author's description become evident as one turns the pages of history to see how the 'two nation theory'¹ proposed by Jinnah from the platform of the All India Muslim League in Lahore in 1940 and his announcement of 'Direct Action Day'² later, in August 1946, to force the implementation of his demand, triggered the wave of violence that spread from Calcutta to Noakhali, Bihar, Garmukteshwar and ultimately reached Punjab. According to Ramchandra Guha, "At the end of 1946 one province that had escaped the rioting was the Punjab... Starting in January, episodic bouts of violence broke out in the cities of Punjab... From March to August, every month was hotter and bloodier than the last" (2008: 11-13).

Having given the readers necessary information to reflect over the excesses committed in the past, he then goes on to say how the rustic, innocent people of Mano Majra were not even aware that their country had been partitioned. Peace still prevailed in their tiny village, which had only seventy families, of which Lala Ram Lal's was the only Hindu family; the rest were Sikhs and Muslims, almost equal in number. The most remarkable feature of this 'oasis of peace' was the 'three foot slab of sandstone' that "all Mano Majrans venerated" (Singh, 2009: 2). The text reveals: "It is the local deity, the deo to which all villagers – Hindu, Sikh, Muslim or pseudo-Christian – repair secretly whenever they are in a special need of blessing" (3). The 'three foot slab' of sandstone, thus, becomes a symbol and also a source of existing peace in the village.

The opening of *Tamas*, set in Lahore, in the pre-Partition period is in sharp contrast to the picture of peace presented in the opening section of *Train to Pakistan*. Right at the beginning, Sahni makes it clear that the people of Lahore were not only aware of the impending Partition but their

¹ In 1940, at the annual session of the All-India Muslim League held in Lahore, Jinnah, the then president of the Muslim League formally proposed the division of India along religious lines. In his famous presidential address, he made clear the need to form a separate and independent state of Muslims named Pakistan. See Ramchandra Guha. *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, (New Delhi: Picador India, 2008), p.9 Also see Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947* (New Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd., 1983), pp. 378-9.

² In support of his 'Two Nation Theory' Jinnah announced August 16, 1946 as 'Direct Action Day' across India. See Jeff Hay, *The Partition of British India* (New York: Chelsea House, 2006), p.64.

minds had also already been corrupted by the separatist tendencies and had indulged in machinations to trigger communal violence. It seems relevant to remark here that Sahni was familiar with the workings of the people's minds, understood their motives and attitudes, which he portrays with remarkable ease and precision in his text. The opening scene where Nathu, a sweeper, is trying to kill a pig is both horrifying and pathetic in its depiction. Bribed and deceived into killing the pig by Murad Ali, a local contractor, who uses the carcass of the pig to spread communal riots, Nathu is represented as the victim of both the capitalist and political forces. The whole scene engages us profoundly as we see plight of Nathu, who struggles to kill the pig yet his mind is pre-occupied by the thought of the five rupee note given to him by Murad Ali for completing the job:

Why of all the creatures, Nathu thought, had this despicable brute... fallen to his lot to tackle...Nathu had tried all the devices but not one had worked. Instead his shins and ankles were badly bruised... The rustling five rupee note that had gone into his pocket had made it impossible for him to open his mouth. (Sahni, 2014: 2-4)

Sahni was fully aware that people like Murad Ali used the power of economics to trap their victims, to use them as tools, to materialize their devilish plans. The fact that people like Nathu remained unaware of the intentions of these manipulators, made their plight even more terrible. It is important to note here that the pre-Partition Indian society that Sahni constructs in *Tamas* is evocative of a dark world (tamas means darkness) where every action reflects and even further expedites the impending violence and the socio-political upheaval. Divisive/negative forces are at work and peaceful coexistence seems to be a matter of the past. In fact, even between those who share friendships or business relationships, there exists, in their sub-conscious mind, hatred or suspicion of each other. Sahni shows how Shah Nawaz, an influential Muslim business man of the locality, has made friends with some Hindu families. He even rescues them and ensures their safety in times of crisis. He is described as a dependable "friend and a sociable, cheerful fellow. Loyalty to friends was an article of faith with him" (165). However, even this dependable friend turns into a ruthless killer when communal violence breaks out in the city, and he kills Milkhi, his friend Raghu Nath's servant. To quote from the novel:

How and why this happened cannot be easily explained – whether it was the chutia of Milkhi's head or the grieving crowd of people he had seen in the mosque or the funeral procession...Shah Nawaz gave a sharp kick to Milkhi on his back... his forehead split and his spine broke... Milkhi's

eyes were open and set on Shah Nawaz's face as though wanting to know for which fault of his Khan ji had done him to death (77).

Spine-chilling descriptions like the one mentioned above, abound in the text, and they disclose an important preoccupation of the novelist: the animosity that existed beneath the veneer of harmony, which takes the form of fanaticism during the times of communal discord. Then there is the old Sikh couple, Harnam Singh and his wife, who live in Nurpur and run a tea shop. When the communal riots begin, Harnam Singh is convinced that his family would never be harmed. Thus, he says to his wife who had been insisting on leaving the village:

Karim Khan has assured me no less than ten times that...no one would dare cast an evil eye on us... we are the only family of Sikhs living in the village. Will they not feel ashamed of attacking two defenseless old people? (215)

Harnam's questions raise the issues of security that confront the nation even today, and which came into existence with the arbitrary drawing of borders. B. R. Nanda poignantly sums up the situation:

Sudden and overwhelming violence descended upon the minority communities at different places on both sides of the border... The declaration of the Boundary Commission Award shook the confidence of the minority which found itself in the 'others' homeland; physical violence only completed the process of demoralization... Like a lightning flash it came to them that the game was up; everything seemed alien to them... even their house frightened them as a potential prison or a slaughter house... The definition of a secular state and the charters of minority rights were just dangerous nonsense to those who felt themselves in deadly peril. (Nanda 90)

Such has been the impact of Partition on the lives of the people that with the passage of time it has come to be viewed, as Ranabir Samaddar says, as "a concentrated metaphor for violence, fear, domination, difference, separation, and the unsatisfactory resolution of problems; a metaphor, in one word, for the past, one that goes on making the present inadequate" (Samaddar, 2001: 22) It is worth noting here that when Karim Khan asks Harnam to leave the village in anticipation of an attack by the 'marauders', Harnam feels "disenchanted rather than angry and frightened" (Sahni, 2014: 216). Though he is grateful to Karim Khan for his timely warning, his faith is badly shaken, and he leaves the village with his wife, taking with him nothing except his gun and a few currency notes. Harnam's anguish over the forced eviction from his own home is at once intense and heart- rending:

No sooner had they stepped out of the house that the entire place became alien to them ... They had lived at that place for twenty long years, yet within the twinkling of an eye, had been turned into homeless outsiders. (221-5)

Harnam's condition exemplifies the condition of millions of people whom Partition had rendered homeless and turned into exiles within their homeland, a poignant and unsettling truth, the trauma which both Khushwant Singh and Bhisham Sahni had experienced, and which was also largely responsible for the sense of anguish and disillusionment which they wished to express to the world. In order to do this they chose fiction for they firmly believed in the potential of art to provide a space for creative artists to re-enact significant moments of history and imbue them with immortality. They also wished to enable readers to re-vision those moments and discern the subtleties involved in their occurrence.

Revision as Re-vision

Re-visioning, as far as readers are concerned, is not a simple act of reading but a conscious re-view of the violent happenings of Partition, envisaging it not merely as yet another horrendous event of history, but rather as a violent and lasting process, initiated by a confluence of several interdependent factors –political, religious, economic and social. Such re-visioning also needs considering to understand the profundity of the two authors' vision and imagination as regards Partition, which could perceive and recapture even the minutest detail leading to/constituting the event and create such meaningful and convincing narratives, that could alter the most fundamental beliefs and attitudes of, at least, some readers. Acknowledging the power of fictional texts to have an effect on our behavior and personality, T.S. Eliot says: "The fiction that we read affects directly our behavior towards our fellowmen, affects our patterns of ourselves...affects directly...the whole of what we are..." (1932: 393-4)

Fully aware of the potential of the novel to "disseminate positive social values and progressive political messages" (Daiya, 2008:14) and alter their behavior towards their fellowmen, both Singh and Sahni used their rich imagination to reconstruct that dark phase of Indian history when violence had become a way of life, humanity was brutalized and hatred and suspicion reigned supreme. And since "it is language which speaks in literature... not the author himself" (Eagleton 1996: 120), they employed a language that could activate the sensibility and imagination of readers and enable them to see the missing dimensions of the partition experience

and unravel the web surrounding its occurrence. Singh's language in *Train to Pakistan* commands influence by virtue of its rich and graphic imagery, which he uses to show the contamination of a remote Punjab village by the barbarism that possessed the nation during Partition. The most dominant image in the text is that of a train which recurs throughout the text and becomes the pivot around which the entire action of the novel revolves. It needs to be stressed here that in any discourse on Partition -literary or historical- tremendous significance has been accorded to trains. "An image of overloaded trains with people pasted on to every possible part of its body – clinging on to the windows, perched precariously on footboards, hanging between the buffers, crowding on the roofs", says Rituparna Roy, "is what immediately comes to mind while thinking of the Partition. It is an image that has been permanently imprinted on the nation's collective imagination...to refer to the Partition" (2010: 35). Even textbooks of history contain references to trains to denote the horrific tales of violence that were perpetrated on the people travelling on them. "Among the grimmest episodes of violence", says Jeff Hay, "were those on the trains that traversed the region, especially those that traveled the short distance between Lahore and Amritsar...It was common for trains full of corpses to reach the stations in Lahore and Amritsar, as well as those of smaller towns" (2006: 94).

It is evident that Singh was well aware of the fact that the very mention of the word 'train' would ignite the memories of Partition and transport readers' minds to those turbulent times. That is why he uses it in his text but, rather than conceiving the image merely to symbolize the horrors of Partition, he enlarges its role and range considerably, envisioning it as a signifier of change and transition – change from motion to stillness, from order to disorder, from life to death. It is in view of the changing connotations of the term, from being an object which had hitherto functioned as a positive force, a governing principle of life in pre-Independence/ Partition times, to become a site facilitating the endless cycle of retributive violence, rendering its protégé helpless and vulnerable to bestialities in post- Partition time that the author's use of the image of the train needs to be examined in detail. At the very outset, laying emphasis on the significance of trains in the lives of the Mano Majrans, the author makes it clear that, as Mano Majra was located near a railway station, the pattern of Mano Majrans' everyday life was set and regulated according to the timing of different passing trains. The Mullah at the mosque, the priest at the Sikh temple, the people, the children, in fact, the entire village scheduled its day during peaceful

times according to the whistling of the passing trains. However, as times changed, the same trains turn into ghost trains, which bring a load of corpses and fill the village with a deathly silence on their arrival. It is, in fact, the arrival of one such train in Mano Majra that changes the lives of its people forever. Here is an instance from the text which reflects the author's vision of the Partition violence associated with trains:

There were women and children huddled in a corner, their eyes were dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if their shrieks had just become voiceless... There were bodies crammed against the far end wall of the compartment, looking in terror at the empty windows through which must have come shots, spears and spikes. These were lavatories, jammed with corpses of young men who had muscled their way to comparative safety... The most vivid picture was that of an old peasant with a long white beard; he did not look dead at all. He sat jammed between rolls of bedding on the upper rack meant for luggage, looking pensively at the scene below him. (Singh, 2009: 89-90)

In one single stroke, Singh establishes the undeniable historical fact that trains arrived on both sides of the border with the dead bodies of thousands of refugees. Needless to say, the author had observed too closely the colossal damage caused to humanity on the trains by deliberate human acts of manipulated frenzy and bestiality. What is even more striking is the fact that his intense imagination recaptures, with vividness and perfection; those images which force their way into the consciousness of readers to make them see with clarity the sheer helplessness of the people who had been the victims of the endless cycle of retributive violence facilitated by the movement of trains across the borders. As Jisha Menon argues, "Partition transformed its image into a foreboding emissary, an uncanny reminder of the 'gifts' of slaughtered bodies sent across in trains by Muslims in Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs in India". (2013: 93)

In contrast, Sahni's novel does not mention the word train, instead images associated with the dark and captive world of violence dominate the text. Night emerges as the most important recurring symbol of darkness, and all the major episodes of plunder and arson occur under the cover of darkness. The darkness of the author's vision, emanating from his perception of the sinister reality of Partition, seems to have extended to his work and finds expression through the constant evocation of darkness, which engulfs the beings of all of those who were caught in the whirlwind of emotions, passions, disruptions and destructions. The image of flames of fire is also reiterated in the text, symbolizing the fire of communal violence that raged throughout the nation: "Flames of fire still rose from the building of the Khalsa School. All the houses

belonging to the Sikhs on the slope overlooking the stream had been gutted, besides all three shops of the butchers, and the houses of three or four Muslims in Teli Mohalla, had been set on fire” (Sahni: 284). Not surprisingly, the image of the flames of fire, like the image of the train, has come to be inscribed in the collective memory of people as a horrific symbol of Partition violence, and is reflected in several texts of literature and history. Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy-Man*, for instance, also shows the city of Lahore going up in flames. The words of a British officer in the Punjab at the time of Independence are also worth quoting here: “The Punjab is an absolute inferno and it is still going strong... It will take generations of work to put things straight” (Hay, 2006: 93).³

Partition caused immense grief and loss to the people, and has been depicted as such by writers through a series of images and events exposing the naked reality of dehumanized violence. Sahni delves deep into the causes of its occurrence, analyses it with penetrating insight, ascribing its root cause to the age old enmity between the Sikh and the Muslim communities, as is revealed by the text:

The atmosphere in the gurudwara was as solemn as water-laden clouds... the minds imbued with the past... the presence of the Muslim foe, the Guru’s ‘prasad’, the paraphernalia of past battles... and the bond that united them into one unbreakable entity... if anything did exist it was the Turk, the traditional enemy of the Khalsa... the imminent combat which was to them like the great ritual into which they would plunge, ready to lay down their lives. (Sahni: 231-32)

What is striking in the previous quotation, is the identification by the author of the root cause of the communal problem, namely, the regressive tendency of the people, that binds their minds to the past, that forces them to look back to the painful and traumatic moments of the past and, that past, when experienced through the mind, is made real by associations with present experiences. As Sahni argues in the following passage:

The Turks too mentally viewed their attack as an assault on the citadel of their age-old enemy, the Sikhs. In the minds of the Sikhs too they were the Turks of the bygone medieval times whom the Khalsa used to confront in battle... The ‘warriors’ had their feet in the twentieth century while their minds were in medieval times. (282)

³ See Royle Trevor, *The Last Days of the Raj*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), p .196. qtd. in Jeff Hay, *The Partition of British India* (New York: Chelsea House, 2006), p.93.

Acknowledging the history of violence and confrontations, Sahni puts the blame on the people's tendency to cling to the past, to the unsettling, disquieting moments of the past that make those moments a vital part of the present. This is reflected in the text through the reference to the "war song which used to be sung by the Khalsa" (228) three hundred years earlier, and also to the royal court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, whose very name evokes the glorious moments of Sikh history. Their minds transported to those past times, imbue them with the spirit of sacrifice and prompt them to act in the present. This, however, does not mean that Sahni suggests a clean break from the past, instead, he seems to advocate an acceptance of the fact that the blunders of the past have to be recognized and that the present has to be safeguarded against those. This is made amply clear in the epigraph from John Buchan to the celluloid version of *Tamas*, which reinforces the need to take lessons from the grievous errors committed in the past: "The hasty reformer who does not remember the past, will find himself condemned to repeat it" (Nihlani: Episode1). Emphasis is put on the need to learn from the mistakes of the past, for history, Sahni seems to say, tends to repeat itself in the most distressing way. The past has to be continuously monitored, it has to be regularly weeded out for, the past, if allowed to grow unchecked, would choke the present. This is manifested in the text through the depiction of the futility of the battle that lasted for two days, the dead bodies that lay scattered here and there throughout the village, the death of the Sikh women who jumped into the well, and the houses reduced to dust. What is even more shocking and agonizing is the fact that, after the bloodshed and violence have ceased and harmony is restored, when the members of different communities get together, they think of having maximum monetary gains from such situations – property to be purchased, deals to be finalized, bargains to be made – especially in those places where property prices had fallen because of the riots. The fact that financial gain/profit was also one of the driving forces of the communal violence in Lahore has been supported by much documentary evidence, according to which the "tide of violence expedited the anticipatory migration of wealthy and politically astute Hindus and Sikhs out of Lahore. In the midst of chaos, selling of properties, shifting assets... climbed up" (Chattha: 207).

Sahni's depiction of pre-Partition violence remains rooted in the city of Lahore and in the life of its people. However, what is remarkable in his treatment of the situation prevailing in Lahore is his imaginative insight into the psychology and behavior of the different people inhabiting his

fictional universe. Nobody escapes his penetrating glance – not even shrewd British officers like Richard, who held eminent positions towards the end of British rule in India. Richard represents the fears, apprehensions, hypocrisies and strategies of the British rulers during the last days of the empire in India. Nothing perturbs Richard, not even the worsening communal situation in Lahore, and so he says to Liza, his wife: “What can I do if there is tension between the Hindus and Muslims?” (Sahni: 53). One can easily make sense of what Sahni wishes to express here: the insensitive and ruthless attitude of the British, who could have prevented the riots, had they nipped them in their initial stage. Richard’s character is in sharp contrast to the character of Hukum Chand, the Deputy Commissioner in *Train to Pakistan*. The physical description of Hukum Chand is anything but attractive, yet his intentions, unlike Richard’s, are noble. He wants the safe evacuation of the Muslims of Mano Majra and succeeds in his mission. He uses his tact and resourcefulness to save the lives of many people. Richard, on the other hand, fails to impress readers on account of his irresponsible and deliberate act of letting violence continue for some time before he takes suitable action to control it.

The growing communalism in Lahore in the pre-Partition days is viewed and analyzed by Sahni in different ways. How rumors contributed to accelerating violence, the plight of the people in the refugee camps, what congressmen and communist workers did or failed to do to restore peace, and the role played by the members of different religious organizations when making passionate speeches, storing ammunitions, and devising strategies of self defense or attack – everything finds expression in Sahni’s novel in great detail. In sharp contrast to this, Singh’s text briefly mentions the different issues emanating from Partition. There is a brief reference to the refugee camps where the Muslims of Mano Majra are taken after evacuation. Descriptions of the activities of various religious congregations do not occupy much of the text’s space although towards the end, the text shows a group of unknown armed Sikhs arriving in the village, and assembling in the Gurudwara to incite the men and women present there to indulge in retributive violence and make plans with the gangsters of the village to send a train load of dead Muslims to Pakistan. It is remarkable that all of these actions of the Sikhs are performed with the religious fervor and sanctity of a sacred act. The Sikhs, Khushwant Singh makes it clear, believe that what they are doing, “is in the service of the Guru” (Singh: 161).

The violence thus performed is regarded by them as a religious act. This dramatic reversal in the role of religion, from being a source of sustenance in peaceful time to a source of violence in turbulent times, is treated by the author with utmost care and sensitivity. Bhai Meet Singh, the priest of the Gurudwara, the custodian of religion, refuses to take part in this religious ceremony, which is then performed by the Sikh youth and other village people. Singh makes it absolutely clear that it is not religion, but a misinterpretation of religion and its ideals, that causes fanaticism, a belief also shared by Sahni, who also denounces this with equal intensity and force through the scenes of the Gurudwara and through the activities of different congregations. Both writers perceived this reality, but it is Khushwant Singh who may be credited with what readers may find missing in Sahni's text, life-saving spiritual acts of sacrifice. Violence perpetrated in the name of religion needs to be effaced by religious acts. Therefore, in order to rectify the wrong and excesses committed in the name of religion, Khushwant Singh offers the concluding episode of his novel, as the grand finale to his scheme of things – Jugga's supreme act of sacrificing his life to save the train load of Muslims going to Pakistan, which clearly echoes Bataille's ideas in *Theory of Religion*: "Sacrifice at last displays its idealizing potential in action, its symbolic power to efface the lethal destruction that lies at its core" (Bataille, 1992: 67).

Presented as an expiation ritual, and coming at the end of the novel, Jugga's sacrifice is meant to cleanse the community/society/nation of all its past sins and compensate for all the violence that lies at the heart of the novel. The fact, that he succeeds in saving the lives of the Muslims of Mano Majra is symbolic of his victory over the evil forces of destruction. It is also suggestive of the redeeming vision of the author, his unwavering faith in humanity, which leads him to make his hero, the dreaded and notorious Jugga, sacrifice his life for a noble cause. His sacrifice, though, also motivated by his personal desire (to save Nooran's life, who was also travelling on a train to Pakistan). However, the way it is performed (he seeks the guidance and blessings of Bhai Meet Singh, the priest of the Gurudwara) turns Jugga into a saint, a 'mahatma'. It is clear that Singh wanted to show that anyone, even a ruffian like Jugga, is capable of performing acts of virtue and moral goodness, and that it is not necessary to be a saint to do good, to be virtuous. In fact, it only takes a moment for change of heart to be effected. He places the responsibility of moral goodness on him, as the novel ends with him sacrificing his life so that the lives of others are saved. Jugga's death results in the continuity of numerous other lives because, in his case,

“death is the great affirmer, the wonder struck cry of life” (Bataille: 46).

Jugga’s death safeguards the lives of the Muslims of Mano Majra. It is important to note here the religious dimension of Jugga’s sacrifice, which disclosed Singh’s attitude towards Partition. He saw it as a curse brought about by the sins of the people, who indulged in insane acts of violence, turning the pious land into a wasteland, and hence puts the emphasis on the need for some sacrifice to free the land from this curse. Sahni, on the other hand, by setting his novel in the colonial period and emphasizing the continuity of violence, wishes to show how Partition is a continuous/ongoing process and so he ends his novel with a disinterested Richard speaking to Liza about his transfer to a new place; a scheming Murad Ali who raises slogans of Hindu-Muslim unity and the Congress Party workers once again engaged in their usual bickering (despite Jarnail’s death), thus making it clear that Partition violence will go on if people do not change their attitude. What comes to the surface in the final analysis of the two texts is a clear picture of the mindset of the two authors: that of Sahni as a psychologist, a great clinical observer, who possessed a keen understanding of the psychology, behavior and motives of the people; who knew what motivated people in performing acts of violence and that of Singh as a sage, a seer, who knew what was needed to end this violence and make fresh starts, and gave his interpretation of the true spirit of religion and its implementation through sacrificial acts. What is even more important, though, is the common purpose both authors shared. Through the textual representation of the traumatic events, the two writers enable readers to re-vision the past with sheer clarity, make them aware of the disastrous consequences of unjust desires and hasty judgments, and urge them to take lessons from the past and revise their attitudes, thinking and practices so that the mistakes of the past are never again repeated.

Conclusion

There are layers and layers of opacity surrounding Partition. Both *Train to Pakistan* and *Tamas* unravel those layers and make us re-view with sheer clarity and force those complex yet decisive moments in Indian history, when “unspeakable atrocities and indescribable inhumanities were perpetrated in the name of religion and patriotism” (Khosla, 1989: 3) and enable us to understand how the communal and fundamentalist instincts “derange[d] our understanding of moral rightness” (Bhalla, 1994: vii). Tolstoy claimed, “art is an organ of human life, transmitting man’s

reasonable perception into feeling... Art should cause violence to be set aside” (797). Both *Train to Pakistan* and *Tamas* compel us to re-think, re-consider and revise our preconceived notions, beliefs and assumptions, thus corroborating Terry Eagleton’s belief that, “as we read on we shed assumptions, revise beliefs” (67) for “the valuable work of literature ... teaches us new codes for understanding... our conventional assumptions are ‘defamiliarized’, objectified to the point where we can criticize and so revise them” (68).

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