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# Post-colonial and Psycho-social analysis of Indian Partition Narratives in *Tamas* by Bishma Sahni and *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie

Aradhya, Dr. Raman Malik

Student, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

Assistant Professor- II, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

**ABSTRACT:** The year of 1947 was a significant year in the lives of millions of Indians. India had gained independence and the colonizers had finally left the Indian subcontinent. After centuries of struggles run by Indian revolutionaries and all kinds of atrocities suffered by the people of the country, the dream for self-rule aka Swaraj had finally become a reality. But the celebration period didn't last long as the colonizers and many power-hungry politicians had succeeded in escalating the inter-communal disharmony and pushing the country towards a bloody partition. This partition turned out to be the worst man-made calamity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Huge number of people were forced out of their houses. Muslims had to move to Pakistan while millions of Hindus moved to India, and this was not a decision that was taken by individuals voluntarily rather it was decision motivated by fear. People had no choice but to leave their everything in order to save their lives, that was extent of hate and communal distrust that was present in the society at that point of time. A peek into the Indian history reveals the statistics about the number of Hindus and Muslims killed, women raped, children kidnapped and houses set on fire. The historical records are able to showcase the superficial reality of partition but what they fail to capture are the human emotions and experiences. These showcase the number of women killed and raped but fail terribly at exploring the trauma they had experienced who had to choose between death and self-respect. And others who had survived but were suffering at the hands of a society that values a women's chastity above everything. The deep anguish experienced by mothers who had poison their own daughters. These statistics fail to capture the pain of lost home, friendship and love. This research paper focuses on such humane aspect of partition narratives by deriving examples from *Tamas* by Bishma Sahni and *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, all the while exploring the mentioned texts from a post-colonial lens.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the year 1947, India was partitioned into India and Pakistan. Later, India faced another partition as the independent nation of Bangladesh was formed. While both the partitions resulted in causing serious social, cultural, and demographic complications, the partition of North-Western part of India into India and Pakistan is till date considered as one of the worst man-made calamities of the Indian subcontinent. Official data provided by the government of India indicates that approximately 10 million people had to migrate because of this split, but in reality, there would have been another thousands of cases left unreported. The partition of India left an incredible mark on the national consciousness of the nations of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and it persists to influence the countries' citizens to this day. Partition literature is a nuanced depiction of the tragedy of Partition, a period in the history of India that is tough to make sense of. It includes political, historical and demographical studies. It goes beyond the rectilinear narrative that has been carved by the government records and explores the multi-layered dynamics of the partition of India. It was such a huge event that it found its mentions in many works produced at that point of time and even at present. The historical records are able to showcase the superficial reality of partition but what they fail to capture are the human emotions and experiences. They show the number of women killed and raped but fail terribly at exploring the trauma they had experienced who had to choose between death and self-respect. And others who had survived but were suffering at the hands of a society that values a women's chastity above everything. The deep anguish experienced by mothers who had poison their own daughters. These statistics fail to capture the pain of lost home, friendship and love. The government records never reveal the unsung heroes, who choose humanity above the so-called religion, and risked their lives in order to save life of their brothers and sisters from a different religion. While history narrates the decisions taken by popular figures, literature goes deep and brings to light the experiences of the marginalized individuals. Thus, all that is ignored by history is explored by literature. The incidents that led to and those that followed the partition of India inspired a genre of literature called the "Partition literature". The common element of the works of this literature is its ability to capture human emotions and the common themes of its renowned works are violence against women, sexual

exploitation, communal and religious riots, etc. The writers of this genre have presented the history in a very different light than the historians. They included human agony, suffering and trauma of the partition. For example: in English there are many great writings like Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight Children*, Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man and Bribe*. In Hindi and Urdu there are works like Yashpal's *Jhoota Sach*, Bishma Sahni's *Tamas*, Manto's short-stories like *Toba Tek Singh*, *Adkhri Salute*, *Titwal Ka Kutta*, *Khol Do*, *Thanda Ghosht*, etc.

#### Postcolonial studies

Postcolonialism refers to the field of literary studies that focuses on studying the experiences and struggles of the colonized people, along with, the aftermaths of colonization on the subsequent generations of the colonized nations. Emerging primarily in the latter half of the 20th century, postcolonialism challenges traditional Western narratives of history and power by centering the experiences, perspectives, and agency of formerly colonized peoples.

Postcolonial critiques read between the lines of the texts by the colonizers and bring to light the "other" part of the story that was silenced for a long period of time. Postcolonialism examines the contemporary manifestations of colonial power and exploitation in the context of globalization and neocolonialism. It analyzes how economic, political, and cultural processes perpetuate inequalities, dependencies, and forms of domination that reproduce colonial legacies in new forms. It examines the contemporary manifestations of colonial power and exploitation in the context of globalization and neocolonialism. It analyzes how economic, political, and cultural processes perpetuate inequalities, dependencies, and forms of domination that reproduce colonial legacies in new forms. The Postcolonial Indian scenario was far more complicated as it coincided with a hasty partition. After years of extorting resources from the nation through their policy of divide and rule, the colonizers left India after creating the biggest divide that the two nations are still attempting to heal. This project takes into consideration the ideas of various postcolonial critiques such as Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and Homi K. Bahaba, to analyse *Midnight's Children* and *Tamas* from a Postcolonial point of view.

#### Post-colonial reading of *Midnight's Children*

*Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie was first published in the year 1981. It quickly gained recognition as the book bagged the prestigious Man Booker Prize in the same year it was published. Salman Rushdie soon became an international phenomenon and his book became the representative of Indian Writings in English, as well as, of Indian Postcolonial literature. The book also received 'Best of Booker' and 'Booker of Booker' awards in the years to come. The book is no doubt a seminal work, that portrays the development of Indian history from the era of colonial dominance to thirty years after independence. It tries to relate the lives to public events and to explore the limits of individuality in India. It narrates the story of 1000 children who were born at the stroke of the midnight India gained its independence. The protagonist, Saleem Sinai is one of these 1000 children and so he, just like the other children, possess some magical powers. That in his case are telepathic powers along with a great sense of smell. His powers allow him to see future and also connect him to other midnight children. Inextricably linked to his nation, Saleem's story is a whirlwind of disasters and triumphs that mirrors the course of modern India at its most impossible and glorious. Being born at the moment of India's independence, Saleem's whole being gets inseparably linked to the nation. In the first part of the book itself Saleem starts by narrating the story of the time he wasn't even born. The book starts when his grandfather Aadam Aziz had just returned to Kashmir, after having studied medicine in Germany. Aadam Aziz is unable to choose a philosophy to live by, should he accept the western ideals that he had practiced in Germany or should he return to the religious/orthodox ideals of Kashmiri society. One day while praying, he hits his nose on the hard ground and so his nose begins to bleed and his eyes begin to water. Rushdie uses a beautiful imagery here as he compares the frozen droplets of blood to rubies and his solidified tears to diamonds. He resolves to never pray, after the incident. But a mere incident of hitting one's nose against the ground shouldn't motivate someone to stop praying for once and all. Maybe Aziz had lost his faith long ago and this incident just acted as catalyst. The author uses a character named Tai, who is a Kashmiri local to point out the shift of Aziz's beliefs from traditional to modern. Homi K. Bahaba (a world-renowned postcolonial theorist) had written about the development of hybrid individuals in a postcolonial society, these individuals adopt the ways of both the colonized and the colonizers. We can point out the similar traits in the character of Aadam Aziz. He is mocked at by the others characters and is considered a mimic. At the same time, the author mocks the locals who choose suffering and orthodox traditional ways, as a form of rebellion against the oppressor and as a way to stay connected to their culture. This leads to creation of a class of hybrids in a postcolonial society and this class just as pointed out by many researches doesn't find a place among the colonizers or the colonized. After getting married Aziz leaves Kashmir and shifts to Punjab with his wife. The couple often argues on their different opinions on Traditional values and Modernity. While Aziz had long embraced the western ideals, his wife still had deep rooted traditional beliefs. In one such incident Aziz asks Naseem (his wife) to come out of purdah, an idea she rejects with great disgust. You want me to walk naked in front of strange men. (He hastold her to come out of purdah). The novel traces the significant historical events intermingled with magic and fiction. The

first such event is the infamous Jallianwala Bagh massacre. It closely showcases the pain and suffering of the people who had suffered, by portraying Aziz as someone who had witnessed and survived the incident. He condemns the actions the colonizer. And through the book makes the readers aware of the atrocities the colonial government had implied on our people. Calling out the colonizing power is a common and a very powerful characteristic of the postcolonial writings referred to as 'writing back to the empire'.

#### The theme of Fragments and Partitioning in *Midnight's Children*

The story of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is tightly linked with the concept of dividing and fragmentation, creating a rich tapestry of ideas. *Midnight's Children* primarily addresses the historical event of Partition, which resulted in the 1947 split of British India into the sovereign countries of India and Pakistan. The drama takes place against the backdrop of the country's religious division into India, which is home to the Hindu majority, and Pakistan, which is home to the Muslim majority. The protagonists in the book experience a disintegration of identity as a result of the nation's separation. But when artificial borders are imposed, communities are split apart and uprooted, and identities are reconstructed in the wake of Partition. This causes the cultural landscape to become fractured. In the book, Rushdie uses temporal fragmentation as a storytelling device. The narrative is presented in a non-linear fashion, with Saleem recounting his life story from the perspective of an elderly man thinking back on his past. As Saleem struggles with the intricacies of his own identity and the violent history of his country, this fractured narrative structure represents the fragmented nature of memory and history. Overall, Rushdie uses *Midnight's Children's* theme of dividing and fragmentation as a lens through which to examine the complex relationships between identity, history, and nationhood in postcolonial India. Rushdie challenges readers to consider the legacy of Partition and its ongoing influence on both persons and society through complex storytelling and rich symbolism.

#### Analyzing *Tamas*

The Title 'Tamas' is derived from a Sanskrit word for darkness. In Hindu mythology there are three 'gunas' or qualities in each individual, and the level of each guna in the individual determines their personality. The three gunas are: Rajas (action), Tamas (darkness) and Satva (goodness or enlightenment). Sahni uses this title to represent the dark mental state of Indian people. All the people were in darkness and there was no light. Some people were not aware of the reasons that motivated their hateful actions and while others had no idea as of where to seek help. The novel showcases the confusion of both the communities, Hindus and Muslims, regarding their origin and roots. Divided by religion, they are unable to see that the blood that they are slaying is half their own, as despite being followers of varied religion they belonged to the same land. Sahni mocks this behavior and thinking of the people by stating that, "Their feet were in the twentieth century nut head was in the middle of that". With the progression of the storyline, the violence escalates. Mobs attack individuals and communities based on their religious identities.

In the course of the novel, life-long friendships and relationships come to an end with the rising communal frenzy. By the end of the novel the focus shifts to the mass exodus, that followed the partition, as people are forced to flee from their homes in search for safety. Sahni portrays the great cost of the partition, not only in the terms of the number of individuals who lost their lives but also the irreversible changes to the social fabric of the region. The novel is a reminder of the horrors that can result from the communal hatred and manipulation of societal tensions for political gains. By the exploration of the human expense of the Indian partition, *Tamas* serves as a powerful call for empathy, understanding, and peace. Till date it remains a seminal work for its historical significance, narrative depth, and exploration of the darker aspects of the human nature. The psychological realism in the novel is profound. Apart from telling the story, the author delves deep into the psyche of his characters, providing reader with a view into the internal challenges that many individuals had faced in the crossfire of partition. This psychological depth is crucial for understanding the human aspect of historical events. It shows how various individuals react to external pressures and moral dilemmas, exploring the complexity of human psyche and human being's capacity for both compassion and cruelty under extreme circumstances. Sahni employs a multi-perspective narrative technique, weaving together lives of diverse characters across social and religious spectrums. The realistic nature of the novel serves as a form of historical documentation, providing future generations with a view of the lived experiences of those who endured the partition.

#### Symbolism in *Tamas*

**The Dog:** The novel also uses the dog as a symbol for the dehumanization and degradation of underprivileged communities. Since dogs are frequently connected to filth and scavenging in Indian society, their inclusion in the story highlights the prejudice and social hierarchy that prevailed during the partition era.

**The Fire:** In *Tamas*, fire represents both purifying and destruction. It is the vehicle via which communities are subjected to acts of violence that result in fatalities and destruction. But fire also represents the purging of social evils and the potential for regeneration and rejuvenation following the turmoil of separation.



The Darkness (Tamas): The novel's Sanskrit title, *Tamas*, alludes to ignorance or darkness. It stands for the moral and spiritual blindness that permeates society when there is intergroup conflict. People's humanity is obscured by ignorance, which makes them act in unspeakably cruel and hateful ways.

The Train: In *Tamas*, the train represents both displacement and division. During the split, trains were utilized to carry people over freshly formed borders, but they also turned into locations for massacres and acts of violence. In the book, the train represents the anguish of mass displacement and the broken communal ties that millions of people went through during the split.

Mosques and temples are examples of religious buildings that represent the sacred and the profane in *Tamas*. These houses of worship, which ought to represent harmony and peace, end up being the sites of conflict in the novel's portrayal of intergroup violence. During times of conflict, religious standards are degraded, as seen by the destruction of holy sites.

These symbols in *Tamas* help the book explore themes of violence, communalism, and human nature in India during the partition. They help the reader gain a deeper comprehension of the intricate dynamics at work and the significant influence that historical events have had on people's lives and society

## II. CONCLUSION

There are enormous writings in Indian subcontinent dealt with the naked brutality of this notorious event called partition. It is not possible in this short canvas to cover all these writings. Raj Gul's novel, "The Rape", H. S. Gill's "Ashes and Petals", Alamgir Hashmi's novel "Clear Light of Day", Gurucharan Das's "A Fine Family", B. Rajan's "The Dark Dancer", Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children", K. A. Abbas's Inquilab and many more works written by Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani writers represent the theme of the partition of Indian subcontinent into two nations on the basis of religion and the resultant brutality, oppression, rape, murder, abduction and above all the annihilation of humanity. Thus, the role of these writers is not merely to record this destructive event fragmentedly but to dive deep into the root causes of its occurrence and to depict the tragedy it brings to humanity. In this way literature plays an important role of preventing the future generations from taking part in the dusty dance of death which history does not. This research has delved into the multifaceted narratives surrounding partition, uncovering a plethora of voices, experiences, and interpretations. Partition remains a deeply contested and emotionally charged event in the collective consciousness of the affected communities. This research has also focused on the importance of preserving and amplifying marginalized voices within partition narratives. While dominant discourses often prioritize certain perspectives, it is crucial to recognize and elevate the voices of women, subalterns and other marginalized minorities, whose experiences have been historically overlooked or silenced. Their stories offer valuable insights into the human cost of partition and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of its legacy. In conclusion, while partition remains a deeply painful and contested chapter in Indian history, it also serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of acknowledging diverse perspectives, confronting difficult realities and working towards a more inclusive society of the future. Through research, education and dialogue, we can strive to ensure that the lessons of partition are not forgotten and that its legacy is one of remembrance, understanding and reconciliation.

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