CHAPTER II

AN ANALYSIS OF KUSHWANT SINGH’S TRAIN TO PAKISTAN AND BISHAM SAHNI’S TAMAS

Train to Pakistan

Kushwanth Singh was among the earliest Indian writers to take up the traumatic issue of India’s partition and dealt with it in a lucid and vivid manner. He handles the theme of partition deftly exploiting it both intellectually and emotionally. Singh does not question partition directly, but he criticizes it severely.

Train to Pakistan brings out a moving account of the bloody partition, in the tiny Indian frontier village of Mano Majra. The village is situated on the banks of river Sutlej and is predominantly a Sikh village. Sikhs and Muslims had lived there for generations in amity. Majority of the Sikhs were the Landowners and the Muslims were their tenants. The only Hindu family was Ramlal’s, who was the affluent money lender. Ramlal gets robbed and killed by a band of dacoits under the leadership of Malli. But the police arrest the usual suspect Juggat Singh, a local dacoit. At the time of the incident, Juggat Singh was with his Muslim beloved, Nooran in the fields. Juggat Singh was considered to be the strong suspect because of his former connections with the bandits, outlaws and the dacoits. Amidst the chaos of partition, a European-
educated young man with an ambiguous name of Iqbal arrives to the village and heads towards the Gurudwara to ask for a place to stay. Later, he too gets arrested in connection with the murder of Ramlal. The simple and humble residents of Mano Majra are undisturbed by partition and Independence till a train from Lahore silently comes over the bridge at an unusual time carrying loads of dead Sikhs. The people have loved each other and they swear not to harm their friends, neighbours and brothers. Very soon, the Mano Majrans are influenced by outsiders and get corrupt enough to turn towards their old friends.

After burning all the corpses brought by the ghost train, the villagers witness another train that arrives in a similar fashion, but this time filled with more horror. The entire village goes into a state of frenzy and because of the arrival of the ghost trains Mano Majra is introduced to unexpected mass exodus. The earlier rumours of communal violence turned into reality. Plots were hatched and tales were spread about the mass deaths and destruction in the neighbouring towns and villages. Friends became foes and the long lasting tradition of brotherhood and harmony vanished into thin air. Every Sikh in the village spoke to their Muslim brother with deep rooted suspicion. The Sikhs were even ready to kill their Muslim brothers. Helpless Muslims decided to move to the refugee camps. The Hindus and Sikhs decided to take revenge upon the Muslims by killing all the refugees on board in a train fleeing India and heading to Lahore. Juggat Singh comes to know of the heinous conspiracy and decides to rescue all the passengers including his beloved, Nooran. He foils
the entire plot at the cost of his own life. The passengers escape a terrible fate and reach their destination without any serious harm.

The novel visualizes how locally and individually, the villagers of Mano Majra begin to re-articulate their identities and alliances following the arrival of the trains laden with dead Sikhs and of the Sikh refugees from Pakistan. The once unified Mano Majran’s are polarized into ethnic groups. Hindus and Sikhs stood on one side and the Muslims on the other. The plot to kill all the Muslim refugees shows the amount of hatred and madness that had accumulated in the minds of the innocent villagers.

In the opening of the novel, Kushwanth Singh briefs about the Indian Independence by emphasizing on the weather. It was the summer of 1947 and lot drier than the other summers. By mentioning about the season, Singh tells us the effect of the partition, the outcome of Independence, which has cut one great nation into two halves, accelerating tension in every single home and exploding into bloody riots. The friends turn into everlasting foes and men with humanity turned into beasts, seeking blood of their own kith and kin on both the sides of the newly formed Indo-Pak border.

The fractured Independence that India attained did not have any effect on the people living in country side. Mano Majra was also one such remote village, which did not bother about Independence and its effects. Perhaps, the people had a different opinion about their status if India attained Independence. When Iqbal, the social reformer poses a question before the
Village Lambardar, “Why, don’t you people want to be free? Do you want to remain slaves all your lives?” (TTP 62) The Lambardar after a long silence answered:

Freedom must be a good thing. But what we will get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes? No, the Muslim said, Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were slaves of English, now we will be slaves of the Educated Indians... or the Pakistanis. (TTP 62)

In the circumstances created by partition, the affected people instead of getting more land or buffaloes lost whatever land and cattle they possessed and they all had to flee to their new destination for survival.

The people in the countryside did not value the Independence. The Lambardar says “We were better off under the British. At least there was security” (TTP 64). Independence through partition meant killing and robbing. The people in the countryside felt that the real beneficiaries of freedom were thieves, robbers and cut-throats. When Iqbal questions to Lambardar as to what is going to happen now, the Lambardar answered, “We know what is happening. The winds of destruction are blowing across the land. All we hear is killing. The only ones who enjoy freedom are thieves, robbers and cut-throats.” (TTP 64)
Independence not only divided two countries, but it also parted the ways of life, manners and attitudes. It also broke a long-held friendship and created permanent enmity. It induced thirst for blood of the other.

Kushwanth Singh portrays Mano Majra as bright, contented and calm during the times of tumult while most of the other villages across the country were wreathing under the burden of communalism. The Muslims and Sikhs were happily ignorant of the ghastly riots that were setting ablaze the entire nation. The Mano Majran’s were unaffected still and stuck to the Gandhian ideals of brotherhood, even though Gandhi himself was then walking the bloody paths of the riot inflicted India. Nevertheless, Mano Majra was a typical village where people belonging to various religions lived in amity. Sikhs and Muslims, more or less were equally distributed in the village. The village was integrated in such a way that, all the villagers venerated a three foot slab of sandstone Deo, the local deity. Though religiously distinct, they all worshipped the common deity. “Hindu, Sikh and Muslim or pseudo-Christians – repair secretly whenever they were in special need of blessing” (TTP 2). Imam Baksh and Meet Singh were the two religious heads of the Muslims and Sikhs respectively. Both the Muslims and the Sikhs loved their clerics. Imam Baksh had endeared himself to the villagers as ‘Chacha/Uncle’ and Meet singh was the ‘Bhai’ to everyone. The two priests waited for each other to make the first call for prayers in the morning. Meet singh says to the social worker, Iqbal: “everyone is welcome to his religion. Here next door is a Muslim mosque. When I pray to my guru, Uncle Imam Baksh calls to Allah...” (TTP35)
As per the say of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Mano Majra had “functional ‘Integration’, and indeed there are tens of thousands of villagers like Mano Majra, where the law has always been peaceful co-existence, and not communal strife.” (1985, 498) It is only after the arrival of the ghost train, the village slowly advances towards disintegration and the age old harmony gets shattered. Even then the majority Sikhs of the village did not encourage any harm to the Muslims, though communal passion had been prevailing in the atmosphere.

Singh shows that when things go pell-mell, even the majority will be afflicted with fear complex. Pala Prasada Rao observes that the fear complex “…is further accentuated by a faulty reading of history. When things are misrepresented, the consequences are ghastly and reason and logic are put behind.” (Nirupa Rani 34) The murder of Ram lal by a dacoit, Malli was interpreted in such a way that in a matter of very short period, the incident gained communal overtones. The police played a major-role in sowing the seeds of mistrust among the Muslims and the suspicion of the police about the Mano Majrans and the whereabouts of Sultana and Iqbal made the Sikhs look at Muslims with an air of doubt and suspicion. The visit of the police also divided Mano Majrans into two halves. There was a complete silence among the Sikh community and each incident aroused suspicion on their fellow Muslim neighbours. The acrid smell of searing flesh which they had smelt when corpses from the ghost trains had been burnt, sends a chill down their spine.
“Quite suddenly every Sikh in Mano Majra becomes a stranger with an evil intent. His long hair and beard appear barbarous, his kirpan menacingly anti-Muslim” (TTP 105). There was also a fear of suppression that gripped the Sikhs minds. They felt that the Muslims were dominating the Sikhs. They remembered their Guru’s preaching not to trust a Muslim. Iqbal’s reported aim to spy on them was a shock and as Prasada Rao says, it “jolted them out of the cocoon of complacency and well-being.” (Nirupa Rani35). They retort in a fit of desperation: “we have looked upon the Muslims as our brothers and sisters. Why should they send somebody to spy on us?” (TTP 105)

The fire of suspicion spread swiftly and both the communities adopted diametrically opposite and hostile position with their misunderstanding of history for which British were mainly responsible. Bipin Chandra says:

Many of the British historians were often aided by broad considerations other than those of historical survey. First they wanted to see the fact that the Indian people had always been ruled by cruel tyrants and controlled despots. (254)

The British education system propagated these false ideas which were imbibed by the Indians without any enquiry. The Sikhs of Mano Majra also called up the atrocities inflicted by the cruel Muslims on their forefathers. History played a predominant role in teaching Hindus as well as Muslims, the insults done to their children and torture inflicted upon their women by the enemy communities.
All through the Muslim period of Indian history...what have they done to Sikhs?...hundreds of thousands have been put to the sword for no other offence than refusing to accept Islam; their temples had been desecrated by the slaughter of kine; the holy Grandh torn to bits. (TTP 106)

The point that the Muslims and others waged wars on religious grounds was stressed by the British historians. Bipin Chandra says:

the myth of Muslim rapine and destruction was thus utilized in order to stress the point that there was nothing wrong if the British rule was autocratic and despotic. But what makes the difference was that their (the British) rule was benevolent and just and operated under the rule of law (246).

Such interpretations of historical facts, eventually gives communal overtones. The arrest of Iqbal and the murder of Ramlal in the novel ignited fear in both the communities. The Britishers sought after such division so that it could lead to communal carnage. In the words of Iyengar, “there is enough evidence to convict the British administrators, who after a hundred years of trusteeship could only prepare for this holocaust.” (1983, 501).

The factor that causes religiosity was false reading of history, fear, suspicion and mistrust. The use of one’s religion to non-spiritual issues with a view to promoting the interests of a community proved to be very detrimental in the long run. The Sikh youth, in order to avenge on behalf of his Sikh brother,
chanted the verse: “By the grace of God Will bear the world nothing but goodwill” (TTP 132).

Communal riots take place when an individual is caught hold of religious fervor. It is a known truth that communalism never involved people’s real-life demands or interests. If propagated rightly that their religion itself were in danger, the fear complex can be fully aroused and can be put to a situation of frenzy. The Sikhs were all agog that their religion would be at stake and this fear led them to act immediately against the Muslims.

If the communal politics has to be moved to the level of popular movement, some kind of emotionalizing factor is needed. Even the educated youth could not resist, but has to succumb to the passion of his community. There cannot be difference between a city-bred youth and a country-bred youth in this matter. In fact, it was the city-bred youth who fumed and fretted that the Sikhs had sent the Muslims alive. Such youth only symbolize false religiosity. The uneducated peasantry group of Sikhs belonging to Mano Majra succumbed to the instigations made by the educated. The words Hindu, Sikh and Muslims were constantly used to infuriate the Sikh peasants. “...for each Hindu or Sikh they kill, kill two Mussulmans. For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two...” (TTP 129). Such words not only infuriated their minds but it also clouded their reason. The news that the Muslims of their village had already evacuated did not give them any relief. They did not want the Muslims to go unharmed, and thus they try to execute their plot.
Early in September the time schedule in Mano Majra started going wrong. Trains became less punctual than ever before and many more started to run through at night. Some days it seemed as though the alarm clock had been set for the wrong hour. On others, it was as if no one had remembered to wind it. Imam Baksh waited for Meet Singh to make the first start. Meet Singh waited for the mullah’s call to prayer before getting up. People stayed in bed late without realizing that times had changed and the mail train might not run through at all.

Children did not know when to be hungry, and clamoured for food all the time. In the evenings, everyone was indoors before sunset and in bed before the express came by. Goods trains had stopped running altogether, so there was no lullaby to lull them to sleep. Instead, ghost trains went past at odd hours between midnight and dawn, disturbing the dreams of Mano Majra (TTP 91-92).

This is just the prelude to the nightmare that the villagers of Mano Majra had to undergo in the next few weeks in the wake of the Partition. There was a succession of violent and unprecedented events that followed each other rapidly in the summer of 1947, leaving the villagers totally helpless and disoriented. Bhai Meet Singh, the priest of the Gurudwara, very aptly sums up what the villagers went through towards the end of the novel. Updating Iqbal on the recent events in Mano Majra, the Bhai tells him:
What has been happening? Ask me what has not been happening. Trainloads of dead people came to Mano Majra. We burned one lot and buried another. The river was flooded with corpses. Muslims were evacuated, and in their place, refugees have come from Pakistan. (TTP 191-192)

These words are of crucial significance as they detail the eviction of the Muslims from their own village that is accorded a place of primacy in the narrative. Certainly, it is the most poignant part of the whole narrative. It evokes pathos when Chacha Imam Baksh comes to the Sikh assembly and asks their verdict on the sudden decision of the local administration to evacuate the Muslim villagers of Mano Majra in the faint hope that they will ask him and his fellow Muslims to stay. But he is reassured, only to be disappointed, for everybody understands the purport of the Lambardar’s words when he says:

Yes, you are our brothers. As far as we are concerned, you and your children and your grandchildren can live here as long as you like... But Chacha, we are so few and the strangers coming from Pakistan are coming in thousands. Who will be responsible for what they do? (TTP 147)

The Chacha accepts his fate, though with a heavy heart, but his daughter Nooran simply refuses to leave the place of her birth. She is fierce in her assertion of her rights as opposed to the emotional outburst of her father in
the Sikh gathering. Chacha tells her that if she does not leave by herself, then she will be ‘thrown out’. And in fact, that is exactly what happens to the Muslims in Mano Majra, for they are ‘thrown out’ by their fellow villagers.

By themselves and as a community, the villagers were naïve and ignorant people with very little political awareness and with even less knowledge of what was happening in India at the time. Independence and the Partition had not affected their lives till then, just as the struggle for freedom had made no difference in their day-to-day affairs. They could not even understand what the fuss about Independence was all about.

When such a community of people who seem to have no dealings with the political life of the nation whatsoever are suddenly thrust into the vortex of a political cataclysm, it is but natural that it would not register on them at first. As Singh shows in the novel, it is through the medium of the refugees that the people of Mano Majra first come to know of the violence just outside the confines of their little world, a violence that was spilling over and now spreading into the heart of their own village. . When Meet Singh expresses his discomfort with the idea of being entrusted with the custody of the evacuated Muslim villagers’ property, saying that it might later lead to misunderstandings between friends, the Sikh officer replies, you are quite right:

Bhaiji, there is some danger of being misunderstood. One should never touch another’s property; one should never look at another’s woman. One should just let others take one’s goods and sleep with one’s sisters.
The only way people like you will understand anything is by being sent over to Pakistan; have your sisters and mothers raped in front of you, have your clothes taken off, and be sent back with a kick and spit on your behinds. (TTP 157-158)

This is actually a blow that is even worse than the evacuation of the Muslims. The villagers of Mano Majra thought their friends and neighbours were reaching safety and for that reason, the evacuation meant something good to them. But what the Sikh officer was talking of was a scenario devoid of all sanity and humanity. Gradually, the novel records the progressive darkening of their vision as they are stripped, one by one, of all their illusions. And nowhere does this transpire better than in the actual act of the evacuation of the Muslim inhabitants of Mano Majra.

The Muslims of the village of Mano Majra thought that they were going to the neighbouring Chandannagar camp only for a few days, locking their houses and leaving their cattle under the care of the Sikhs. But soon they learn that though they will be staying at the Chandannagar camp for a few days, afterwards they will have to proceed to Pakistan. The truth now strikes them that they have been moved to go to Pakistan and not to halt and then come back to Mano Majra once the storm has blown over. But an even greater shock awaits them, and this is the realization that they cannot take their belongings with them, and that they can only take what they can carry in their hands. They are forced to leave everything not under the care of their fellow villagers,
as they had thought, but in the custody of Malli, the dacoit of the neighbouring village and his gang and a few refugees, and everybody knew what these people would do with their belongings. Still, a pretension is kept up by the police that their goods will be returned to them in due course, and so, a mock list is made of the items left behind. Both the Muslim and Sikh officers involved in this operation know, of course, that the Muslims are going to Pakistan forever and that nothing will remain of their belongings, which will either be looted or destroyed. Hence in a matter of hours, the world of the Muslims in Mano Majra falls apart forever. They are stripped of all their hopes, begin to realize that they are about to lose everything, and yet are powerless to do anything about this. In a unique way, this ironic building up of loss is dramatized in the novel, showing the utter helplessness of ordinary people overwhelmed by historical forces that are simply beyond their control, or even their comprehension. But the most poignant part of the entire episode is of course the farewell, or rather the lack of it. As the narrator says:

There was no time to make arrangements. There was no time even to say good-bye. Truck engines were started. Pathan soldiers rounded up the Muslims, drove them back to the carts for a brief minute or two, and then on to the trucks. In the confusion of the rain, mud and soldiers herding the peasants about with the muzzles of their sten guns sticking in their backs, the villagers saw little of each other. All they could do was to shout their last farewells from the trucks... The Sikhs watched them
till they were out of sight. They wiped the tears off their faces and turned back to their homes with heavy hearts. (TTP 159)

The entire happening is not only a very crucial one in the novel, but also a representative one, for what is shown as happening in the novel was actually happening all around in the Punjab and Bengal in 1947. As Iyengar perceptively comments: “What is recorded with such particularity was but a speck in the dust-whirl that was the Partition” (1983, 501).

Every religion is significant because of its ethical codes. In this novel ethics which should be the kernel of a religious code has been carefully removed by Kushwanth Singh. Religion is hollow and devoid of values for Iqbal. He contemplates saying:

For the Hindu, it means little beside caste and cow protection. For the Muslim, circumcision and kosher meat. For the Sikh, long hair and hatred of the Muslim. For the Christian, Hinduism with a sola topee. For the Parsi, Fire worship and feeding vultures. (TTP 149)

A soulless world of religion can only create disharmony and discord as found in the Indians. Emotions overtake reasons which cause the miserable failure of religion.

Kushwanth Singh captures the feelings and the emotional response of the Muslims when they were forced to leave their homes. Prasada Rao says that “rural population of Punjab was not at all prepared for the big holocaust which
partition proved to be” (2004, 39). The people were caught in a jolt which was beyond their understanding. R.K. Dhawan says “it came as a big destabilizing factor in the smug and contented self-sufficiency of the Indian rural life” (1985, 78). The Muslims heard of the atrocities by Sikhs on their Muslim brothers and also of “mosques being desecrated by the slaughter of the pigs on the premises and of the copies of the holy Koran being torn up” (TTP 103). With heavy hearts they decide to leave Mano Majra. There was a gloomy atmosphere at the thought of the separation. Pakistan did not mean anything to them. Imam Baksh says with tear filled eyes “what have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here, so were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers.” (TTP 110) It was extremely shocking to go away from what they knew to be their home. Muslim women sat on the floors hugging each other and crying. Each Muslim house looked as if there had been a death in it. The Sikhs too assured of all help and protection but the irate refugees from Pakistan posed a threat. The Muslims were advised to go to refugee camps for a few days.

Kushwanth singh symbolizes Iqbal, as a replica of the cunning political leaders in the garb of socialism who literally comes to Mano Majra not to induce Communal carnage or to stop the riots, but to watch the drama at Mano Majra. He is so sarcastic and nihilistic in approach, which brings down the spirit of his mission, which was to keep the village unaffected by communalism. He makes mockery at the entire nation’s problem as an offshoot of the annual birth rate. Towards the end of the novel he finds that no corner of the northern frontier of India was free from the infection of communal
virus. In a fit of emotion he even thinks of sacrificing himself to avert the attack on Muslims heading towards Pakistan planned by the Sikhs. But for him sacrifice was futile and he felt that he won’t be there to witness and admire the supreme act. Being a reformer Iqbal had a proclivity to interpret every situation in terms of violence for the sake of grabbing political and economic stability. Kushwanth Singh portrays Iqbal as an aristocratic imposter, a snob and a fraud.

The novelist also shows that life is meaningful and purposeful as it also produces men like Bhai Meet Singh, who strictly dislike religious bigotry and instead opts for humanism. He was the only Sikh, who reasoned why Muslims of Mano Majra should be punished for the crime committed by their fellow Muslim brothers in Pakistan. His notion was that only guilty should be punished. He voiced for the Muslims of Mano Majra. He questioned: “what have the Muslims here done to us for us to kill them in revenge for what Muslims in Pakistan are doing” (TTP109). But his voice was unheard in the hubbub of communal madness. The law was savage in the matter of communalism. It opted, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Meet Singh’s voice was too weak before the savage law. Even then “It is the still small voice of sanity, the voice of reason, and the voice of humanity” (Iyengar 500).

Without delving deep into sentimentality, Kushwanth Singh brings out the triumph of love, of humanism and of faith in the goodness of man through the ruffian Jugga. Jugga was a self-confessed badmash, after he was
released; he comes to know the plot to attack the train, which meant danger to his beloved Nooran, the Muslim daughter of Imam Baksh. He risks his own life to foil the plot. The avengers had already planned for the attack and had tied a rope as stiff as a shaft of steel across the first span of the bridge to kill all the passengers who boarded on the train. Jugga slashes the rope with his Kirpan. There is a volley of gun shots fired at him. Jugga shivers and collapses. The rope snaps in the centre as he fell. The train runs over him and goes to Pakistan with all the Muslim refugees safe. Kushwanth Singh brings from an unexpected quarter, this supreme sacrifice. What the bureaucracy, the intelligentsia, the men of religion and the political leadership failed to do was completed by Jugga. Though his intention was to save his beloved, the fact is that, he did the incredible. The passion of Jugga saved hundreds of innocent people. Chirantan Kulshrestha says: “Jugga’s act of love and sacrifice silhouetted against the backdrop of hatred and violence towers above the communal differences and lends a meaning to the general aimlessness of the life in the partition days.” (1977, 152) Jugga proved a man of action. He is neither lost in the maze of ideologies nor was he lost in the labyrinthine thought process. His action was a contribution to harmony and integration.

The life in the village started and came to a close with the timings of arrival and departure of the train at Mano Majra. It was a source of hope and awe as well. Its rhythmic movement during the day and the night was likened with the sequence of events and even the motivation process. The train was the prime mover for the Mano Majra residents. There was a mail train between
Delhi and Lahore touching Mano majra with the daybreak and its whistles aroused villagers from their overnight sleep. With the arrival of this train, the Sikh priest and the Muslim Mullah called the faithful to prayer. There was another train which was a passenger train from Delhi reaching Mano Majra at 10.30 a.m. when it finds men in the fields and women in the kitchen. Yet another express train reaches the village station at midday, a time for rest and lunch for the villagers. Then there was an evening train and lastly a freight train at night, signaling the villagers to go to sleep after the day’s work. There were some more trains which passed through the village station during the night hours. Singh writes about the state of villagers after the freight train passes: “Then the life in Mano Majra is stilled, save for the dogs barking at the trains that pass in the night” (TTP 14). The trains, which symbolised life and action in the pre-partition days of Mano Majra, represented death and disaster after the partition.

The arrival of the ghost train to Mano Majra railway station is the first cause of worry which further developed by the collection of kerosene oil and firewood from each of the inhabitants of the village. Banta Singh, the Lambardar collects the woods and oil to burn the bodies which the train brought from Pakistan. The villagers were not informed about the train load of bodies. Though suspicious, the villagers wanted to reassure as to what happened exactly. They were impatient with the Lambardar because of his proximity with the police. Meet Singh angrily asks the Lambardar: “O Lambardara, why don’t you tell us something? What is all this big secret you
are carrying about? You seem to think you have become someone very Important and don’t need to talk to us anymore” (TTP 99).

The Lambardar tries to be ignorant and replies:

No, Bhai, no. If I know why would I not tell you? You talk like children. How can I argue with soldiers and policeman? And didn’t you see how that pig’s penis spoke to Chacha(Imam Baksh)? One’s self- respect is on one’s own hands. Why should I have myself insulted by having my turban taken off? (TTP: 99)

The mood of the villagers even at this point is the affirmation of composite culture of the village and it shows no trace of any animosity, creating a Hindu- Muslim divide and, in fact the villagers were angry at the insult heaped upon Chacha Imam Baksh, when he queries whether everything was all right.

When there was commotion across the country during the partition, villages like Mano Majra remained very peaceful, except for gossips about the riots in cities and other urban areas. But early in September, the storm of partition made difference to such peaceful villages too. The changing scenario is well pointed out by Kushwanth singh:

Trains became less punctual than ever before and many more started to run through at night (…) Meet Singh waited for the Mullah’s call to prayer before getting up. Children did not know when to be hungry(…)

72
everyone was indoors before the sunset and in bed before the express came by(...)goods trains had stopped running altogether, so there was no lullaby to lull them to sleep. Instead, ghost trains went past at odd hours, between midnight and dawn, disturbing the dreams of Mano Majra. (TTP 92-93)

Thus, the train becomes a dual symbol, creating a strange atmosphere, as it brings in daylight the bodies of the slain people from Pakistan and the bodies are consigned to flames in mysterious circumstances. Kushwanth Singh describes the bizarre scene saying, “a soft breeze began to blow towards the village, and it brought the smell of burning kerosene, of the wood. And then a faint acrid smell of searing fleshes.”(TTP 100)

Singh describes the ghastly scene so effectively as to fully conjure up the tense atmosphere. His only reference to Muslim Mullah is to create a powerful effect of the strong sense of guilt and remorse in the mind of the mullah as the train had come from Pakistan and it was the doing of his own clan across the border. The narrative states, “That evening for the first time in the memory of Mano Majra Imam Baksh’s sonorous cry did not rise to heaven to proclaim the glory of God.”(TTP 100)

There is a gripping narration of the horror scene witnessed by Mano Majra inhabitants just outside the station where a train load of the massacred people in Pakistan had arrived. The narrative states, “The villagers had seen
the trench being filled with corpses and this went on all day till the sunset...the place looked like a scar of a healed up wound” (TTP 166).

The events of sending train load of slain people who had headed for India in search of new hearth and home and the cold reception of the bodies and secretive arrangements under tight security for disposing them off and mass burning of bodies without tears in the absence of friends and relatives of the slain people at an obscure place suggests the dehumanization of life and its values. It is also suggestive of a fierce backlash which in fact is attempted when a train from Mano Majra carrying uprooted Muslim inhabitants leaves for Pakistan.

Hukum Chand, the magistrate newly arrived in Mano Majra to maintain peace, plays a very important role in the degradation of the integrity that prevailed among the people. He plans for the evacuation of the Muslims from Mano Majra. His machinations to displace the Muslims of Mano majra and his relationship with Haseena reveal him to be a corrupt bureaucrat. He at first rationalizes away his misgivings about Haseena’s age and reminisces that she reminds him of his daughter and deliberately erases those thoughts to proceed with his sexual act with her. Later, he realizes that he has developed feelings for the girl. Being a married man in his fifties, he is so corrupt to go picking up woman of his daughters age. The narrative conveys:

No fool like an old fool’. It was bad enough for a married man in his fifties to go picking up women. To get emotionally involved with a girl young
enough to be his daughter and a Muslim prostitute at that! That was too ridiculous. He must be losing his grip on things. He was getting senile and stupid. (TTP 200)

At the end of the novel, he regrets his own plans to evacuate the Muslims in the village, which also included Haseena in them. Thus his regret, redeems his communalist acts at the end of the novel. His communal sentiments get mitigated at the thought of the Muslim girl sex worker. He wanted her beside him to ease his stress. No matter how much ever the novel criticizes the communalist ideology, it is clear that women were showcased as sexual objects and cultural symbols that grounds ethnic violence. Chand is portrayed as a communalist who is mean, cheap and a representative of the corrupt state who engineers the destruction of Mano majra. Though his redumption is significant at the end of the novel, he serves as the vital factor in uprooting the harmony of the village taking aid of the building silence and tension surrounded among the people.

Hukum Chand exploits the emotion of Jugga to the fullest as soon as he gets a hint of Jugga’s affair with Nooran and his passion for her. He hatches a conspiracy to save the Muslims going to Pakistan. Jugga is merely a tool in this scheme. Hukum Chand is confident that if Jugga knows that the villagers were planning to prevent the train full of Muslim refugees from the Chandannagar camp from going to Pakistan, he would do everything in his power to stop that, because his beloved Nooran would also be one of the
passengers travelling in that train. So Jugga is suddenly released, to his great surprise, and the news of the Mano Majra Muslims being evacuated is repeatedly hammered into his head. Instantly, he becomes a changed sullen and quiet man. He comes to know of the secret plan of the villagers, but he does not react verbally to it. The narrative does not unfold anything about what he intends to do, but it only provides with a hint that he is aware that he is about to do something solemn. Hence, he turns up at the gurudwara at an ungodly hour and requests the Bhai to read some verse from the Holy Granth. “I want the Guru’s word. Will you read me a verse?” When Meet Singh asks what he wants to do, he impatiently says, ‘It does not matter about that... just read me a few lines quickly” (TTP 198). Meet Singh reads out a piece from the Morning Prayer. After this, Jugga wishes him ‘Sat Sri Akal’ and takes his leave.

It is only at the final stages of the novel that the secret of what Jugga has set out to do is revealed. He decides to defeat the clandestine mission of his fellow villagers. The suspense is kept up successfully till the end, and nothing quite prepares us for Jugga’s sacrifice. Though it is know from the very beginning that he loves Nooran, he is never thought to be capable of such selflessness. In fact, just prior to the time the Magistrate hatches his conspiracy, the sub-inspector says that Jugga seems to be the type who is never swayed by emotion, and that probably he would not even grieve over Nooran’s loss and soon find someone else.
Jugga, however, proves everyone wrong. Jugga’s Nooran gets saved. So does Haseena, the prostitute Hukum Chand had unaccountably fallen in love. He realize his feelings for her only after he comes to know that all the Mano Majra Muslims have been evacuated and have proceeded to the Chundannagar camp from where they would go to Pakistan in a matter of days. For some time, he toys with the idea of keeping her back, but then realizes that it is not possible. However, when he comes to know that the train that will carry her to Pakistan will be attacked, he goes mad. He just cannot allow that to happen, and he decides that if he cannot keep Haseena back, he will at least not let her die. He is in a desperate state, and it is in such a frame of mind that he conceives his conspiracy in which Jugga becomes the sacrificial pawn. Hukum Chand’s plan succeeds, and both Haseena and Nooran are saved, since they are in the train carrying Muslim refugees to Pakistan.

Singh paints the picture of madness through Hukum Chand recreating the tormenting moments in which police and magistracy had to function in a spirit of resignation. The magistrate tells the sub-inspector: “Well inspector Sahib, let them kill. Let everyone kill. Just ask for help from other stations and keep a record of the messages you send. We must be able to prove that we did our best to stop them” (TTP177).

In a spirit of abandon and mechanical resignation, the magistrate finds himself in a helpless state. He wails:
What am I to do? The whole world has gone mad. Let it go mad. What does it matter if another thousand get killed...what is if a few hundred out of four hundred million anyway? An epidemic takes ten times the number and no one even bothers. (TTP 178)

Defilement

Kushwanth Singh registers the rhetoric of revenge through dishonouring Women that was voiced at from all the three communities. The conversation between the Sub- inspector and the magistrate Hukum Chand is pertinent. The conversation between them sheds light on a much regretted but underplayed aspect of partition violence. The sub inspector says:

Sometimes sir, one cannot restrain oneself. What do the Gandhi caps in Delhi know about the Punjab? What is happening on the other side in Pakistan does not matter to them. They have not lost their homes and belongings, they haven’t had their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters raped and murdered in the street. (TTP 31)

To the sub inspector’s outrage, Hukum Chand responds in a more submissive manner. He says: “I know it all. Our Hindu women [...] so pure that they would rather commit suicide than let a stranger touch them” (TTP: 31). Chand’s response not only erases from the ethnic community the presence of the raped Hindu woman, but also endorses the popular ideology voiced even by Gandhi, of suicide as the only option for woman raped or about to be raped.
Hukum chand not only reinforces the common Hindu nationalist rhetoric about women’s purity and defilement, but also locks the ‘Hindu Woman’ into a discourse where sexual violence is a form of dishonor, a dishonouring which amounts to social death, and therefore supposedly makes the very victim - the woman of that violence desire physical death.

He then goes on to remember the contemporaneous experiences of three Sikh acquaintances. A colleague of Hukum chand named Prem Singh was murdered in Lahore by Pathan Muslims. Sundari, the recently married daughter of his orderly, who was raped by a Muslim mob and handed the penis of her castrated husband. Sunder Singh, whom Hukum Chand had recruited for the army, shot his family to relieve them of hunger and thirst during their migration. In ruminating upon Prem Singh, Sundari and Sundar Singh who made their trysts at different palces in different situation, Hukum Chand indexes his cynical distance from the prevailing nationalist rhetoric about independence. The narrative moment of Hukum Chand’s reminiscence offers a number of useful starting points for thinking about Indian national modernity. The trysts of Prem Singh, Sundari and Sundar Singh at Faletti’s hotel, Gujranwala and the train respectively, links the Indian state and its official public events with the experiences of its citizens. Chand recounts Nehru’s momentous words only to test them against the local experiences of individual members of the new national polity:
What were the people in Delhi doing? Making fine speeches in the assembly! Loud-speakers magnifying their egos; lovely-looking foreign women in the visitors' galleries in breathless admiration: “He is a great man, this Mr. Nehru of yours. I do think he is the greatest man in the world today. And how handsome! Wasn't that a wonderful thing to say?” Long ago we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure but very substantially (TTP 32).

The cited passage also addresses the invisibility of the suffering, mass violence, and death that accompanied Partition in the celebratory official and international discourse on Indian independence and decolonization. It situates the story of national emergence in relation to the twin axes of an international global community and Partition’s violence and mass migration. The cynicism towards the barely incipient nation-state manifests itself through a rejection of Nehru and his momentous speech that invokes race as well as sexuality by describing his words and appearance as objects of white women's admiration and desire. Moreover, Chand's description of ethnic and sexual violence suggests not only the absence of ordinary peoples’ experiences of violence in dominant accounts of 1947, but also the failure of the nationalist elite to usher in a peaceful transfer of power. Most importantly the narrative raises questions about the representation of the Indian nation and history. As he describes the rape of newly married Sundari by a mob of Muslim men who first castrate her husband, it is clear that for Chand this sexual violence marks the failure of a
patriarchal nation-state to protect both its male citizens and the honor of its women. Singh opines that in such a bureaucrat's cynical ruminations, national politics betrays the nation's patriarchal family and eventually leads into violence, where Women become the victims of bizarre acts including sexual savagery at the hands of an effeminate Patriarchy.

**Violence and Ethnic bodies**

The novel uncovers the Sikh masculinity in transnational Indian public spheres. Jugga, who is portrayed as a criminal is also ethical in a way that he does not commit any crimes against his fellow villagers. By being such a responsible villager, his type contradicts the class-prejudiced assumption of Chand. Jugga transcends dominant discourses of class identity and religious belonging that marks national citizenship and engender ethnic violence. But it is ironic and significant that it is the figure of Jugga, as a young, hyper-masculine, sexual bad man who saves the Muslim refugees and not the state representative. His deed of saving hundreds of Muslims thus undercuts the best effort made by Chand to engineer communal carnage. Even then Jugga’s lower class criminality is redeemed by his heroic true love only through his dematerialized body. It is only on his crushed, rural, hyper-masculine body that the triumph of secularism, which was figured as heterosexual inter-faith love is inscribed.

The various inter-ethnic sexual relationship prevalent in the novel are only between Sikh/Hindu men and Muslim women. The novel does not figure
any masculinity and heroism involved with a non-Muslim woman. However, the Muslim women in the novel are represented as either a girl-prostitute in the name of Haseena or Nooran, as a pregnant woman carrying an illegitimate child in her womb. Haseena’s body becomes a place for fake bureaucracy in the name of Chand to toy with and Nooran’s pregnant body becomes the carrying agent of the product of the birth of the Pakistani nation out of Sikh-Muslim love. Nooran’s body is also suggestive of the impurity of the ethnic and national identities. But this birth of the Pakistani nation is inscribed as symbolically enabled through the violent sacrifice of Jugga’s strong Masculine body. Jugga’s wounded peasant body becomes an embodiment of both the region of Punjab and the secular Indian nation. This embodiment of true India is also a victim of nationalist politics and its failure. Jugga becomes an authentic representative of India. He is both a secular hero and a victim of the nation. The violence to the male citizen’s body becomes an evidence of the failure of the Indian nation state.

Jugga’s sacrifice is not an imaginary contestation that engineers the failure of communalism at the time of crisis, but it is a troubling return of a humanist, non-national, non-communal force enlightening the violent and contingent boundaries of communal nationalism in the form of Nooran’s pregnant body and Jugga’s crushed body. As Judith Butler puts it in a different context, “an enabling disruption, the occasion for a radical re-articulation of the symbolic horizon in which bodies comes to matter all.” (1993,23) Jugga’s body in a sense takes the wound of the nation-state, in an
embodied performance of a sensate, secular democracy; however, the bodies of Nooran and Haseena are sexually and culturally othered through prostitution and pre-marital pregnancy which are deployed in a different manner. They are not coded as heroic. The narrative worked with both male and female bodies, where the male body is heroicized and the female body is shown as a transitional object and a symbolizing site of intelligibility in the discourse of nationalism. The narrative also suggests that the imminent temporality of the Indian nation can exist only through the traumatizing banishment of inter-ethnic love, and of impure, unintelligible, inter-ethnic identities whose future possibility is embodied by a pregnant Nooran. Jugga’s body shows an ideal masculinity and Nooran’s body and her fecund feminity being Islamic in origin inspires to symbolize the secure and also disappears to stave off the threat of ethnic impurity in the secular nation.
Tamas

Tamas is a novel based on Sahni’s personal experiences as a young man, when he served as a relief officer after partition. He realized the harsh realities of people’s life after the partition tragedy. Like Kushwanth Singh, Sahni also developed a strong faith in humanism. His work is bound with an integration of tradition and non-traditional world view. Influenced by Marxist ideologies, Gandhian philosophy and the positive side of existentialism, his intellectual orientation is pertinent in his novels.

Tamas is an anatomy of partition, which depicts how communal violence was instigated by the fundamentalists in the three major communities of India. The innocent people were the victims, who were duped into catering to the purposes of the communalists, who infused commotion and hatred for their own ends at the cost of inter communal harmony. The title itself suggests depicting and condemning the ignorance and darkness involved in the minds of the people during the violence on the eve of partition of India. The novel also brings to light the madness that stalked the northern province of the sub-continent through various episodes that deals with communal mayhem during the pre-partition days.

The first episode in the novel is the killing of a pig, which kindles off riots, when it was thrown on the steps of a mosque. Ironically, it was Murad Ali, a Muslim leaguer, who induces Nathu to kill the pig. The subsequent episodes, silhouetted against this backdrop, prove how the tentacles of
communalism spread to the neighbouring rural areas. Bisham Sahni clearly indicates that it was the onus of all the three communities, who had barbarically perpetrated arson, rape, murder and conversion in the name of religion. The novel also shows the evil intents of the British through Richard, an I.C.S.

The theme of partition is introduced through the conversation between Richard and his wife Liza. Through their conversation it is clear that the fact of divide and rule policy created havoc by making the people polarized and suspicion sown in each other’s mind who suddenly go blind when communal passion takes hold of them. The British played the pivotal role for the growth of communalism, as they knew well that, “the Indians are an irascible lot and highly volatile …Ready to shed blood in the name of religion …” (TAM 42). The British became deliberate spectators wantonly enjoying the warring communities.

Sahni portrays Richard, the highest official of the district as the mouth piece of the British imperialism. He himself takes the task of implementing the policies of the Imperialistic British rule. It is with an intention to save the empire that the British started to play off one community against the other. Even though there was an inherent tendency towards the division of India formulated by the political movements, the British could have possibly brought down the tendency, but it adopted as a policy to accentuate it and every evil tendency in the country to safe guard their empire. This is evident in the novel,
when Richard says to his wife, “When the people fight among themselves the rule is safe” (TAM 45).

The conversation between Richard and Liza exposes that the British rulers played an important role in aggravating the fire of communalism. Their role became crucial precisely because they held the state power which was a crucial determinant. They could have prevented the Indians from fighting in the name of religion. This again is told by Bakshiji, when he curtly said to Richard, “everything is under you sahib. If you only have the mind to...”(TAM 87) But Richard, who was completely reluctant to restore peace, suggests taking the problem before Pandit Nehru or Baldev Singh. He explains to his wife that if they joined hands and fight against them, the Britishers and the empire would be in great peril.

From this context, it should be noted that, as Bipin Chandra puts it “the communal division was not only the constituent of the policy divide and rule was the only weapon in the armoury of colonialism for its preservation and continuance” (1979, 174). The British governments took all efforts as many groups as possible and widen as many social gaps as possible. They adopted different methods at different time period to split up the integrity of the Indian people. They also tried to keep the Indians hidden from the fact that they all belonged to the same stock. They exploit the elements of communalism to such an extent that the communal division gave them survival to the end.
The novel ruthlessly shows that if people who do not know history are perhaps condemned and as Santayana puts it, “they are certainly prone to repeat it” (Sudha Sundharam, 78). It is evident from the conversation between Richard and Liza. Richard emphatically says:

The first lot came from Central Asia...and those that followed after a lapse of many centuries were also from the same stock. Their origin, so to speak, was the same. The first bunch was known as the Aryans, they came into the country thousands of years ago. The others who were known as Mussalmans made in roads to the country thousand years ago. But their roots were the same (TAM 36-37)

The Indians had a blurred memory of their history and they had often only observed the difference. The people were ignorant of the past that the ethos of a race and a nation is its root in the past, which shapes the present and eventually an inspiration for the future. The Indians lived without knowing their history. Their ignorance was not only about their past, but they also had blindness to their present. Sahni brings out this fact clearly when Richard clearly explained to his wife about the fundamental oneness of the Indians. “Have you ever taken a look at these people? They belong to the same stock, the same features, same noses, mouths, broad foreheads, brown eyes” (TAM 36).
Malcom Darling, during his tour of Punjab in 1945, made careful observation on the changing pattern of relationships particularly in villages. His inspection report says:

if only propaganda had not possessed the air with hatred and distrust, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh could have continued to live happily in the village, as they had done for over a hundred years... we met Muslims who for generations had their genealogies kept and horoscopes cast by Brahmins, and past villages owned by Muslims, sprung from a common ancestor and we even came across one village were Hindu, Muslim and Sikh were of the same tribe. Without good neighbourliness there can be no comfort in the village life, but alas, propaganda with its ghastly brood, mutilation, massacre, and rape, has turned Jinnahs the nation creed in the village in the village from a theory onto a bloody fact.(Bhaskara Rao 66)

Sahni portrays people hailing from the same community to be very different. Ironically, Murad Ali was the notorious communalist behind the entire spate of communal violence. He looked very dark and was short statured with small penetrating eyes contrary to Shahnawaz, who was absolutely sane in helping his Hindu brothers. Shahnawaz looked tall and handsome with broad chest and a cheery face. Likewise Milkhi, the Brahmin looked ugly like a slimy lizard. Mushirul Hasan has stated that:
the obvious fact that the Indian Muslims do not constitute a single, homogeneous and monolithic entity and the differentiating features that characterize Indian society are also to be found within the Muslim community. (1993, Vol. 23)

Interpreting the origin and history of the Indians, Sahni tries to debunk the falsity of the propagation of two-nation theory emphasizing that people belonging to the self-same religion had diverse racial origins. Muslims group themselves as Jats, Gujjars, rajputs, Sheikhs, Syeds, Memons etc., despite all being converts. This caste distinction is predominant during the match-making in an arranged marriage. For instance, Benazir Bhutto, the former president of Pakistan brings out her casteist feeling in her book Daughter of the east, saying that the blood of a wadhera runs in her veins. Wadhera’s are a particular group of people belonging to the Rajput clan from Punjab and Sindh. Not only the Muslims, but the Sikhs also associate themselves as Jat Sikhs, Majabhi Sikh etc., Caste is an important phenomenon that wheedles its way into the most religions in India. However, Hinduism is the religion, where social inequalities prevail in a stark manner in the name of caste.

*Tamas* beautifully depicts the interdependence and co-existence of the people living in the town. There is an aura of friendliness among the people before the communal freny. Kudha baksh happens to be the tailor, who stitches bridal clothes for almost all the weddings that take place in the town. Ragunath and Shahnawaz share a great tendency of warm friendship to the
extent that even Ragunath’s wife doesn’t veil herself before Shahnawaz. She affectionately calls him Khanji. There was also a pleasant atmosphere between the two rival political groups, the Congress and the Muslim league. Thus the multifarious activities of the people, like the measured tones of symphony, were attuned to the heart beat of the city. In common terms, there existed an integrative and syncretic force among the popular and the elite level, though their progress was intervened by localized conflicts over religious symbols.

People always had one big fear of a violent outburst, whenever a procession was taken out by Sikhs on the birthday of Gurunanak or whenever the Muslims took out processions through the bazaar. People remained on tenterhooks when such occasions crossed their life. Under such circumstances, as the narrative says: “people’s mutual relationships and those of the various communities constituting the totality of humanity, were precariously poised” (TAM 89).

The novel looks at the grim consequences of the communal politics which lead to the partition. The past leaders were glorified on common grounds and religious symbols were tagged with party politics, which eventually caused a rippling effect damaging the very structure of society. The communal interpretation of the history under assumptions and basically the same historiographic framework, made the people adapt dramatically opposite and hostile position. Most often, the culprit remains the other community. The entire interpretation by the communalists about the past was allergical. Sahni
proves the fact through Vanprasthiji, the Hindu priest when he chants the following couplet: “Horrible have been the sins of Muslims in the land. Even the sky has refused us its favor and earths its bounty.” (TAM 57)

The crisis was undoubtedly used for divergent political objective and further more the priest clan sought to use it for a harmful cause. Similarly the Sikh believed that the Turks / Muslims are their traditional enemies, and it is their bounden duty to settle scores with them. Their idea was most virulent with Muslims, who reminisced their age old enmity with the Hindus. For them, “a kafir is a kafir. As long as he does not profess the right religion, he will remain their enemy. To kill a kafir brings merit.” (TAM 168) This propaganda was conditioned in the minds of all the three religiosity minded people. To come out of this ideology was perhaps difficult and impossible. J.Krishnamurthy rightly says, “One has to be rightly attentive to see the whole significance of this conditioning. How it divides the people nationally, religiously, socially, linguistically. These divisions are a tremendous barrier; they breed conflict and violence.” (Nirupa Rani 68)

The assumption implied to them that what happened in the past was supposed to happen in the present and will continue therefore in the future too. The contemporary politics were projected and the incidents of the past were exaggerated to cater to the communal politics. The interpretation of the past in all the three communities brought in a feel of fear, insecurity and
isolation among the people of the present. When communal dismay propagated communalism, the communal politics in turn gave them a fillip to alienation.

The medieval Indian history was always seen as one long story of Hindu–Muslim conflict by the communalist. Hindus and Muslims were forever demarcated, because of which their relationship seemed bitter and hostile. This indoctrination seeped in the minds of the youth during their full-blooded age. In the novel, master Devbrat trains Ranvir, a Brahmin to kill a hen, so that he can possess a cold heart. He was waiting for the enemy and was ready to bid his followers to bounce upon the enemy. He imagined how “Shivaji would have paced outside his tent before throwing the gallant soldiers into battle against Aurangazeb” (TAM 137). In a similar fashion, the Sikhs after amassing arsenals overnight, sang in unison, when the Muslim rioters were about to attack the Gurudwara. They thought: “Three hundred years ago, they had sung the same song before going to meet the enemy” (TAM 161).

This hostility between the Hindus and Sikhs on one side and the Muslims on the other side, in a communal view, naturally carried over to the twentieth century and it served the purpose of current communal antagonism. The solution to these communal problems, given by the communities was very identical. The Muslim communists demanded for the expulsion of subordination of Muslims.

Religion, as an issue was brought in actively, only during the cruel fascist phase of communalism to mobilize the common people. Vanaprasthiji,
the Hindu priest offered no religious sermons, but after the congregation, he
gave lectures on communal speeches given by religious leaders. He always had
a readymade topic on the highly charged communal tensions in the city. In all
of his after-congregation sermons he emphasized on the sins of the Muslims in
the land. Moving apart from his saintly identity, he provoked all the Hindus to
have a canister of mustard oil and a sack of charcoal ready at hand to pour
over the enemies. This was commanded on the people, because the Muslims
had collected lathis, spheres and other lethal weapons in the Jamia Masjid.
Temple bell was repaired instantly to alarm the people in case of trouble. The
same was the case with the Sikhs who were aggressive and petulant. Sardar
Teja Singh and others mobilized people together at Gurudwara to announce in
prayer: “the khalsa, the pure heart will dominate the world. The enemy will be
annihilated.”(TAM165)

Partition gave a deadly blow particularly to the Sikhs. Punjab was
mutilated into two parts. For the Sikhs, the birth of two provinces was just like
cutting apart a complex living organism into two which falls into a dead alive
existence for a long time to come. Lord Mountbatten’s press attaché on June
14, 1947 wrote: “we are in the heart of Sikh country here and the prevailing
atmosphere is one of tension and forbidding. They (the Sikhs) see that the
partition of India means substantially and irrevocably the partition of the
Sikhs.”(Dr.B.S Nijjar, 1947)
Like the Sikhs, the Muslim residents of the village had overnight turned into crusaders and were preparing to earn merit by killing infidels.

Bipin Chandra, defines religiosity as the “deep and intense emotional commitment to matters of religion and religious emotions intrude into non-religious or non-spiritual areas of life” (1979, 174). Thus religiosity was a major factor which contributed to the passion and intensity which made communalism politically effective. As Nehru pointed out, there was “too much religiosity in India.”

The novel tries to expose the mask worn by people in the name of religion. The religious side of the communal leaders like Ramjan and Murad Ali presents a clear picture of using religion as a mask to perpetrate violence. Both Ramjan and Murad Ali were not orthodox or not even practicing Muslims. To them the Islamic appeal is mere an instrument of rabble rousing. On the other hand Ranvir and Teja Singh serve the same purpose. Invariably, Nathu, the innocent, who slew the pig at the behest of Murad Ali and became though indirectly the cause of rioting in the city is projected as a person more religious, for he felt guilty and repented for his heinous act.

The novel is a successful exposition of the failure of Gandhian ideals. It is proved in the speech between Bakshiji and Mehtaji. When Bakshiji demonstrated with him to keep away from the Hindu Mahasabha, Mehtaji quickly retorted, “If trouble breaks out, will you come to my rescue?...If trouble comes will...Bapuji come to my help?”(TAM 79)
Nevertheless, Bakshiji and the General stood firm on their grounds of Gandhian ideals and did not forsake it at any cost. The integrity of these men was put to test in many a troubled occasion, but they did not yield to the pressure. Both Bakshiji and the General offered supreme sacrifice with their unshaken Gandhian ideals. Bakshiji remained calm and poised, whenever he was remarked as a ‘Hindu dog’ and the General was struck to death when he harangued on the importance of amity during troubled times. They surpass the overwhelming odds with their humanity.

Sahni illustrates that it is the historical incident which paved way for evil intent in the minds of the people, which manifested it later. Immediately after the killing of the pig thrown on the steps of the mosque, a Muslim is shown running after a cow inclined to kill it. Watching this incident, Bakshiji rightly remarks, “Soon vultures and kites will fly over the city” Very soon what Bakshiji prophesized becomes true. The city runs amuck on flames. “The flames licked upward like the red fangs of a mighty snake gradually spreading” (TAM110). Inder, the Hindu teenager kills a perfume seller on Ranvir’s instruction. Harman Singh’s shop gets looted and set on fire. His daughter along with other women jumped in the well. When the marauder began to seize the Gurudwara, his son Iqbal Singh, was circumsized and converted to Islam. Many poor who were cutting across religious lines were ruthlessly butchered. Riots, arson, murder and forced conversion went on unabated for a few days. When riots came to a grinding halt, two refugee camps were set up to take care of the uprooted people of the twenty villages in the area. These were the
horrors let loose during the pre-partition days, which found a more vigorous, dehumanized expression during the times of partition.

Sahni’s narrative is thus filled with a rare instance of both primary and secondary witnessing in a novel form. The novel tries to negotiate with communal violence. And Sahni has ironically used the certain types to portray as characters. The novel represents the inhuman manifestations of violence which were genocidal massacres that occurred in Punjab.

The novel opens with a critical episode in which Nathu, the skinner of hides, makes several attempts to kill a pig. The pig is focused as an irreducible material actually used for a purpose more repulsive. “The animal itself represented as possessing a visceral reality” (Saint 151). The pig defeats time and also the amateurish attempt of Nathu to butcher it. The scene is picturised in a symbolic dimension, like enacting a nightmarish struggle with the demons from the past. Nathu observes the confused state of the city but it doesn’t make any sense of the scheme being set into action by wicked people like Murad Ali, who commissioned him to kill the pig. Nathu is thus un-wittingly drawn into the conspiracy circle. The reason and causes for the violence remain misty to him, though he can understand the presence of Murad Ali at different junctures.

The next significant episode was the Prabhat pheri carried out by the congress activists to clean the city gutters. Sahni clearly points out the failure of the congressmen in living up to the Gandhian ideals, which was meant to be
their creed. Sahni, himself being a congress activist, later spoke of criticism of the entire congress programme voiced by the party men themselves and the socialists within the party who were not adherents of Gandhi’s ideology. The only character, who demands respect, is Jarnail, the eccentric Sikh, who loses his life for bursting out his opinion on integration. Jarnail addresses the public at large from different corners, admonishing them for the outbreak of violence. Being whimsical as he had always been, he sets out to quell the riots, marching military style, with a cane tucked under his arm. However he is stuck from behind on the head and killed. Jarnail becomes the tragic victim of the politics of the hatred. Jarnail sets an example of the vulnerability of the pacifists following Gandhi’s ideals who continued to risk all to achieve communal amity at a time in which an intensification of violence seemed to render old-fashioned anti-communal ineffectual. The Muslim leaguers and the Congressmen confront directly at one point, where the Leaguers blocked the Congressmen entering a particular street, influenced by the Muslim Leaguers. The Muslims felt that the Congressmen cannot voice for Muslims. Even Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad was criticized as “the biggest dog of the Hindus, who goes wagging his tail” (TAM 34). Subsequently stones were thrown at the Congressmen on account of the communal tension that arose after the slaughtered pig was thrown at the steps of the mosque. The congressmen were forced to leave the spot immediately. The episode indicates the vulnerability of the constructive work programmes to disruption and the cause being communal violence,
instigated by politicians like Murad Ali. During the entire confrontation, Nathu sees Murad Ali intently observing the event.

The novel highlights the minds and capacity of ordinary people to resist the spread of communal passion. Rajo defends the fleeing Sikh Harnam Singh and his wife when they take refuge in her home. The atmosphere was rampant with looting and greed. Rajo, being a Muslim shows enough courage to resist the propensity for revenge and retaliation showcased by those around her.

**Defilement**

Two instances narrated by the Muslim attackers near Ghulam Rasool’s house magnify the violence played on Women’s bodies. The people who were exchanging notes were outsiders. Ghulam Rasool overhears their conversation filled with the mockery and triumphant pride. One of the attackers says:

The moment we entered the lane, the karars (derogatory term for Hindus) took to their heels!(...) They had lost all sense of direction. One of the Hindu girls climbed to the roof of her house when we happened to spot her. About twelve of us climbed up to the roof. She was about to jump over the railing to the next roof when we caught her. Nabi, Lalu, Meer, and Murtaza –they all had her in turn. (TAM 133)

This incident narrated by the attackers reveals the submissive nature of women, who were forcefully gang-raped. The women did not have any escape from such fate. Even if they showed a little amount of defiance by running or
hiding from the monsters, they were ultimately hunt down by chasing them to the end. Such women when trying to run from her attackers sometimes met death accidentally by falling off the roof or by getting murdered from the attackers themselves, who get infuriated at the sight of a woman running away from them. For some women death becomes ultimatum only after the penultimate act of rape or gang rape is over. Some women were spared from molestation on the pretext of their caste, but death for them was an assured gift readily available at anytime and at any cost during the communal violence.

Even worse was the fate of some women, who unable to resist the brutal sexual act by group of men die in the middle of their violation itself. They remain so passive that their death occurs with no disturbance. Such was the perverted thoughts of men that they do not bother about whether they are dead or alive, but only pounce upon the body of the women fulfill their sexual desire. The attacker who fondly describes his sexual brutality, casually remarks, “When my turn came, she said neither “no” nor “yes” as she lay under me. She didn’t even stir. And then I found that she was dead.” He gave a hollow laugh. “I had been doing it with a corpse!”(TAM 133)

This incident is not only a shock but also exposes the bestiality of men belonging to the other community, which was more than inhuman.

When another incident was narrated by another man, it brings out the plight of low caste Hindu woman, whose treatment by the men of the enemy group was more degrading and barbarous. Women, for them were just like
insects. They only loved to see her wriggle and wreathe in pain. No human value was opted for any woman, who belonged to the opposite community. When such is the case of ordinary woman, the plight of lower class women seeks more sympathy. The attacker describes another incident thus:

We caught a bagri(low caste woman) in the lane. You know, we were hounding out the karars from their house. Our knives were doing a real good job. Whack! A head would fall from its neck! When we confronted this girl she started screaming, Haramzadi! She was begging us not to kill her.’

“All the seven of you can have me” she pleaded. “Do with me what you like but don’t kill me.”

‘So?’

‘So what? Aziz plunged his knife into her breast. She fell down dead.’(TAM133)

As per the law of nature, life stands precious to every human being, but it was partition that witnessed a contrary value given to other’s life. Women were the vulnerable, who were offered a choice either to lose their life or chastity. Some woman like the Low caste woman mentioned above preferred life considering it to be more precious, but ironically, even after begging to take her chastity, she is brutally killed. This savage act only proves the madness of people in the name of communal passion. The girl was untouched as she was a
bagri. Untouchability, the worst kind of social evil becomes the prime factor even at a situation like this. The noteworthy point is that, the idea of casteism this time comes from the enemy community.

**Women and Honour**

There was other kind of women, who chose sacrificing life over losing their chastity. Such women are elaborately portrayed by Sahni.

It was community based notions of purity and honour that overtook many women during the Mayhem. More than fear, it was rather an exceptional way of showing their defiance that women indulged in mass suicide. The collective suicide practice was common among all the three communities. The violence that women faced during the partition riots is shrouded in numerous layers of silence. They were not only the victims who were pounced upon by other community men, but they also underwent violence from their own men in the name of honour. Honour meant a lot to the fanatics of the religion. They were ready to sacrifice the lives of their women, but not yield to the thought of their women touched by other men. The Sikhs in this respect were more aggressive than the rest. They believed in women’s purity and feared the contamination of their community. It was mostly at their inability to protect their women that the Sikh men kill their women.

Urvashi Butalia makes a comprehensive study about this family violence. Manghal Singh, one of the survivors of the partition days gives an account of
how he killed seventeen of his family members comprising women and children at the time of the riots. He reminisces:

After leaving home we had to cross the surrounding boundary of water. And we were many family members, several women and children who would not have been able to cross the water, to survive the flight. So we killed – they became martyrs – seventeen of our family members, seventeen lives... our hearts were heavy with grief for them, grief and sorrow, their grief, our own grief. So we travelled, laden with sorrow, not a paisa to call our own, not a bite of food to eat...but we had to leave. Had we not done so, we would have been killed, the times were such...

(Butalia, 195)

The honour killing on women by their own men folk evokes shock and grief. When probed into the details of the reason behind such killings, there are even more terrible truths hidden. Women and children were the victims of the intercommunity violence that was common among the Sikhs during the periods of riots. The men folk of the Sikh community felt that the women and children did not deserve to live when adversity in the form of violence struck them. They instead considered their women and children to be martyrs who went on to commit suicide. Getting killed or losing their chastity in the hands of the enemies was considered disgrace, as the Sikh community had always been symbolized as people built of bravery. Not only the men, but the women and children were also taught to live brave and endear death without fear. When
Butalia questioned Mangal Singh, why they had killed women and children? He insisted that “the women and children had offered themselves up for death because death was preferable to what would almost certainly have happened: conversion and rape” (1998, 195). When she further questioned, if they had any fear? Mangal Singh angrily replied:

Fear? Let me tell you one thing. You know this race of Sikhs? There’s no fear in them, no fear in the face of adversity. Those people [the ones who had been killed] had no fear. They came down the stairs into the big courtyard of our house that day and they all sat down and they said, you can make martyrs of – we are willing to become martyrs, and they did. Small children too...what was there to fear? (1998, 195)

Though Mangal Singh boasts of such chivalry, the fact is that the entire community was covered with fear: a fear in an entirely different form. The entire community perceived the idea that their women would lose their honour through conversion and rape. Violence, they felt could be countered, but conversion was seen different as something bringing their entire community to a degraded level, which at any point they could not tolerate. The men of the community had a conviction that they could fight, die or escape using their wits and might, but the women were considered vulnerable for conversion. They also had a much strong prediction that their women will be raped and impregnated with the seed of other religion and this made them presume that the women will not only be rendered impure individually, but the entire
community could be polluted if they give birth to impure children. For this fearful reason, they considered that the killing of their own women folk was inevitable, in order to save their race.

As Butalia says “the real fear was one of dishonor. If they had been caught by the Muslim, their honour would have been sacrificed, lost. It’s a question of one’s honour...” (1998, 195)

Even though there is no such episode documented in the novel, Sahni picturises a very heart wrenching episode similar to the family violence. There was another significant practice of mass suicide in the form of jumping into the well, which was common in the victimized communities during the mayhem. Many such incidents were recorded especially in the Punjab province. Urvashi Butalia recollects the story of 90 women of the little village of Thoa Khalsa which belonged to Rawalpindi district. The women drowned themselves by jumping into the well. This practice of mass suicide was common among the people belonging to the Rajput tradition. When their men folk were unable to defend their women from the enemies, this practice of jumping into the well was quite obvious. They were also influenced by Gandhi’s advice to Indian women that in certain circumstances, even suicide was morally preferable to submission.

The Thoa Khalsa incident stirred the imagination of the people of Punjab. The story referred to the communal violence in Punjab, which took place during the pre partition days in the march of 1947. Number of Sikh villages in
the district of Rawalpindi was attacked by an army of communalists for a period of nine to ten days. The attacks were meant to be in retaliation for the Hindu attacks on Muslims in Bihar. It also was meant to avenge the provocative statements made by Tara Singh in Lahore. Thoa Khalsa, a small village in the district was reported to have suffered severe damages amongst other villages like Thamali, Mator and Nara. The attacks had swept the entire population and only a few people survived. Most of the women drowned themselves by jumping into the well. Ninety of the women belonging to Thoa Khalsa held up an emergency meeting and decided not to lose their honour, but to show their defiance by drowning themselves. Ninety women jumped into the well and only three were saved. There was not enough water to drown them all. Similar incidents of mass suicide are recorded by Talbot in his book ‘Pakistan.’ He says, “In Sheikhupura, two wells in the Namdhari Gurudwara were filled with bodies of Hindu and Sikh women who had committed suicide to save themselves from assault after violence on 25-26 August, 1947”(1998, 104).

Sahni captures the community-based notions of honour and chastity that lead Sikh women to sacrifice their lives by throwing themselves down a well, rather than face the prospect of conversion and rape by the enemy. As in the incident of Thoa Khalsa, Tamas elaborates the mass suicide in a vivid fashion. It says:
(...) a line of women, clad in white, emerged from the gurdwara. Jasbir Kaur was at the head of the line, her eyes half-closed with excitement, emotion and religious ecstasy. All the women had removed their dopattas from their heads and put them round their necks. Their feet were bare. They came out of the gurdwara, one after the other, as if in a trance. (TAM 135)

This coming out of the women signifies their gallant march towards a battle between their existence and honour. The removal of their dopattas from their heads symbolizes their removal of the idea of living at the cost of losing their honour. They advance towards the well, which served their daily purpose to exist. The same life giving well becomes a contrary subject. The narrative adds:

The women were now within sight of the well, where they normally came to bathe, wash their clothes and to gossip. They looked unearthly in the light of the fires and the moonlight. They made no sound as they advanced, oblivious to everything around them. Jasbir Kaur was the first to jump. She did not raise a slogan, or address any one. She simply said Vah Guru! Quietly and leaped. As she fell, many more women climbed up on to the parapet of the well. Hari Singh’s wife pulled up her four-year old son after her and they jumped into the well together. Deva Singh’s wife followed next, her infant clinging to her breast. Prem Singh’s wife also jumped in, but her small son kept standing where he was looking down in
utter bewilderment. Then Gyan Singh’s wife pushed him in, ensuring that he joined his mother. Scores of women, with their children, followed (TAM 135).

Irrespective of age, women jumped into the well along with their children. They did not leave back their children face a degraded life in the face of communalism. All they wanted was an escape from the cruelties that was about to happen on their bodies. The women were so defiant that they worried about the pain of impurity than the pain of death. From the incident it is clearly seen that these women did not dare to throw down their lives. They inflict fatal pain just like that. The stubbornness in these women shows how much passionate they were towards their ideals of purity. At the same time it also makes us assume the nature of hardship they would have undergone in the hands of the violators, if they were alive. It can also be said that these women were helpless and were literally driven to the extent of ending their lives rather than leading a life full of torments and defiled scars. These women exhibit an incredible amount of valour in order to save their honour. Their defiance not only helped them save their honour, but also the honour of their race and ethnicity. They also saved themselves from a defiled status in the domestic spheres by ending their lives.

Through the picturisation of this drowning incident, Sahni makes us realize the effect of the communal frenzy that was fast spreading in its beastly attire among the urban and rural areas. The very thought of conversion and
rape ignites the Sikh women for their defiance in an entirely different manner. However justified, the roots for such mass suicides can be traced down from the sectarian hatred and the mood of vengeance that was prevailing in the so-called secular nation-state. The impact of such hatred left behind women being the ultimate sufferers of major violence. If an individual’s attempt for suicide is crime and sin according to the law of the nation and religion respectively, forcing someone for such heinous act is equally criminal and sinful. Ultimately it is the bodies of these women that become the target of violence. In order to win over the women’s bodies, situations like partition and its ethnic violence serves the best playground for their games on women.

After the communal conflagration, Sahni makes an attempt to focus on the plight of the refugees. Peace committee was formed and the leaders belonging to different denomination toured the riot-struck city to propagate the message of peace. The novel offers a twist end to the tale by portraying the sinister Murad Ali, the cause of all troubles, leading the procession shouting slogans.

The action of Sahni’s novel may be presumed to have taken place during the Rawalpindi violence of 1947, which led to disastrous massacres between August 1947 and January 1948. As Anders Hansen figures out, “the violence of this phase was of a qualitatively different kind; an unprecedented number of casualties took place in March” (2002, 107). During these riots, the Sikhs suffered heavy losses and the feeling of being unprepared beset them,
combined with a desire for retaliation. Nearly 3000 were killed and 1200 were seriously injured according to the officially recorded figures. This clearly shows the genocidal intent of the perpetrators. It is much shocking to know from what Hansen emphasizes that:

the role of former soldiers from the Indian British army who returned from the Second World War only to find unemployment. Private armies filled these vacuum and offered stability in a fast changing political scenario. Out-of-work soldiers thus provided professional expertise to amateur groups. The army style organizational setup and frequent use of military weaponry further illustrate the military connection (2002, 107).

During the March riots, the members of such community-based armies increased significantly. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Muslim League National Guard and the Akal Saina were the major community based organizations, which had a membership figure of 50,400, 38, 467 and 6,600 respectively. The Akali Saina joined hands with the RSS against the Muslims. These private armies proclaimed themselves as the defenders of the community. It became more difficult for the people to avoid fighting as they were attacked simply on the account of religious affiliation. The Rawalpindi Massacres thus led to an even stronger sense of polarization between the communities.

An institutionalized riot system was set into place in which the experts such as the demobilized soldiers on both sides played a pivotal role in creating
the conditions for what followed. The advent of the partition created the conditions of fear and near mass hysteria because of which, holding of hostages of the minority population in the two nation states became acceptable and the genocidal intent was free to run rein. Ethnic cleansing and pogroms continued along with honour killings, as communities sought to protect the chastity of their womenfolk. Sahni’s narrative is an unsettling fictive mode of witnessing the moment when the violence in Punjab took a genocidal overtone. The narrative also offers a sense of incomprehension of bureaucrats and the government as regards this turn of events. It is evident from the psyche of the government-appointed relief officer, who catalogues the losses of the refugees, both human and in terms of property after communal rioting. He demands only figures. He says:

I want figures, only figures, nothing but figures. Why don’t you understand? You start narrating an endless tale of woe and suffering. I am not here to listen to the whole “Ramayana”. Give me figures – how many dead, how many wounded, how much loss of property and goods. That is all. (TAM 316)

The babu encounters the occasional inability to grieve that characterizes the behavior of victims. The procedures of relief and rehabilitation and the logic of getting on with life seemed to preoccupy the attention of the survivors at times in such a way that they preclude mourning. The relief officer has a
disjunction between his role as impersonal representative of the administrative machinery and as the unwilling listener confronted by personal tragedies.

**Conclusion**

*Train to Pakistan* presents the Indian perception of the traumatic experience. The novel is unbiased for its documenting of communal frenzy in all the three religions. The novel does not degenerate into historical documentary, as Singh’s narrative technique involves a realistic account of the event. The novel is realistic not just because of its probing into the real but because of its transformation of the actual into symbols and images. The train especially becomes the powerful symbol. The use of technique of contrast makes the novel very impressive. It highlights Jugga’s noble intentions emanating from unfathomable love. The novel is a skillful dissection of the real. The compelling story of people in turmoil is far broader in its implications than its length might suggest.

The novelist deprecates the part played by the educated people of the country in causing devastation, making an irony of the whole movement of freedom. However, the novel does not penetrate into the causes of partition and the reason for the sudden blindness with which the leaders were afflicted during those fateful days. Singh also talks about sufferings and sufferers. Sufferers/ victims make a larger proportion of the characters. But out of all the sufferers, it is the plight of one woman Nooran, who undergoes both mental and bodily agony. She is defiled in the name of love, though not by her beloved.
but by the bureaucracy and the nation-state. Her body becomes the victim of
defilement and it carries its stigma with mutated honour.

Sahni’s creativity is characterized by deep reflection upon the
complexities and nuances of reality. In order to present the rhythm of human
tragedy, Sahni, adopts the method of episodic narrative, which helps him to
draw various experiences to provide with a cumulative effect. His interpretation
of the events following the partition of the nation leans on religious grounds
than historical complexities. As Govind Nihalani rightly says:

As a novel Tamas is episodic in structure, which from the point of view of
literary craftsmanship may not exactly be considered flawless. Yet, as a
piece of literature it reveals the vision of one detached yet passionate,
quite reflective yet emotionally intense (TAM 5).

*Tamas* is a novel which shows the dominance of communal politics
deeply spread at urban level creeping slowly its way into the rural areas. The
political mechanism produced in the novel is a microcosm of sectarian politics
at the national level. The novel shows how communal groups, which were blind
at its roots, could only work at the behest of their communal leaders. The
narrative is significant as it reveals how communal leaders, in the guise of
religion, enforced religious symbols into the act and made battles over them.

The insanity of the people, during the partition riots is horridly expressed
in episodes creating shock and grief. The murders, lootings, conversion and
rape are described in a realistic pattern, which no other novel with the theme of
partition has offered. Without being superfluous, Tamas explores the darkness that shrouded the people during the period of communal unrest. What is more significant in the novel is the portrayal of the agency of women, which articulates both their defilement and defiance. Not making it subtle, unlike other writers, Sahni excavates the crudeness of violence that was perpetrated on women. He shows women both as submissive and brave. A hint of heroicism is reflected by women, who jump into the wells sacrificing their lives in order to keep pure their community, chastity and religiosity. This portrayal is contrary to the sacrifice made by Jugga in Train to Pakistan. While Kushwanth Singh makes a hero out of Jugga, a man, Sahni emulates the brave women who shed their lives to safeguard their honours in many parts of the nation.

Both the novels are common in highlighting the plight of women during the time of communal unrest. It is women who become the victims of situations or forced situations. They become silent victims as in the case of Nooran in Train to Pakistan and the girls who were raped by the attackers in Tamas. Defiance is shown by these women but not through mutiny. They perpetrate violence on their own body by committing suicide. In a way, these suicides though justified at times, cannot compromise with the violent effect that it has on the agency of women. Thus both the novels are clear documents of the miserable plight of women during the periods of unrest.