Chapter 4

Spatial Perspectives of Post 1970 Indian Novels on Communal Riots

As discussed in the earlier chapter, space does not really push things happen but things cannot happen without the space. Space is a possibility of reading literature comprehensively. Since literature is an aesthetic expression of the human experience, space is the locus where these human experiences occur. We may understand all kinds of human experiences represented in the literary works through a spatial perspective, but understanding ‘communal violence’ through spatial viewpoint is a venture in the domains like culture, human geography, anthropology, history, theology, psychology, sociology, phenomenology at the same time.

Post 1970 Indian novels in English on communal riots have been selected for a very specific reason: this time period remarks paradigm shift from ‘enemy is somewhere else in past’ to ‘enemy is in us’. When we interpret the select novels through various spatial perspectives we need to remember that space as a perspective borrowed from a set of disciplines, cannot be adopted directly as an applicational model to literary studies because any applicational model reduces the totality of the framework to a set of characteristics. It has to be recontextualized to cater to the needs of what we call a ‘literary theory’. How does one possibly interpret a literary text through a spatial perspective, is a task this chapter takes on. Here is an attempt to render representation of space of communal violence in the select post 1970 Indian novels in English on communal riots. We have selected five representative texts of the period aforementioned:

1. *Tamas* (1972) by Bhishm Sahni


4.1 ‘Narrative Space’ and Communal Violence:

The narrative space is the textuality of linguistic and literary aspects of language which allows themes to emerge and have dialogue with the reader and the world. When we analyse Indian novels in English written after 1970 on communal riots, we come to know that the hitherto established ‘narrative space’ with a structured plot and closed themes has collapsed. The narrative space of the novels shows the inability to speak in any given format, be it of language or literature. That is why, it seems, each novel fails in articulating communal violence in a “proper plotted” manner and simultaneously succeed in doing the same.

Here, we will try to read the novels discussed so far in the light of the three levels of narrative space discussed in Chapter-3, namely, 1) The topographical level, 2) The level of chronotopic structure and 3) The level of textual structure<sup>1</sup>.

1. **The Topographical Level:**

Literary narratives provide a range of incidents of communal violence at the backdrop of socio-political scenario of the town. Largely, novels written after 1970 portray small urban spaces which were under development and perfect spaces for the communal activities. These towns are the very spaces on which novels develop their plots and characters. Interestingly, there are closed community areas spread across the geography of the town. Such ‘closed space’ can be termed as ‘ghetto’ too, for they are identically different from other mixed-spaces and that is why more vulnerable. As in the novel *Riot*, religious procession of Hindus takes communal colour when
comes in the contact of the ‘closed-space’ of Muslims; one can blame neither the procession nor the ghetto but the collision of spaces. Topographically, novels describe in two specific relationships of the Hindu and Muslim communities: 1) these communities live so close in the mixed spaces and so far in ghettos and 2) the centers of the riots are produced from the periphery where the people in power reside. It is like the puppetry wherein though puppets are at the center of the stage, they are controlled by the strings in periphery. For example, the riots that take place in the novel *Curfew in the City* exemplify the fact that it is always easy to instigate a riot from a distance as one is not likely to be affected by it.

These locations of communal activities resemble the real life space of the riots on which the fictional locations are developed. The common elements that link these novels are the patterns through which a riot/pogrom is penetrated to the demography of the town. Once infiltrated, violence takes on a horizontal route taking away lives, brutal rapes, plundering of property etc. *Tamas, Curfew in the City* and *Riot* render topographical circle of the riot; from beginning of riot to controlling it somehow.

The topographical understanding of communal violence represented in the post 1970 novels shows that there is a constant dialogue between ‘an abstract’ space and the ‘human space’ i.e. among causes of communal violence including the ‘sacred’, ‘historical-colonial’, ‘heterotopia’, ‘political’ ‘psychological’, ‘social’, ‘communal’, ‘gender’ etc. spaces. The characters in all these novels are inevitable parts of the topographical because they are the ones who perform the space of action which is why they become victims and victimizers. The characters like Priscilla in *Riot*, Hermansingh in *Tamas*, Maya in *Lajja*, Salma in *Partitions* and rape victim teenager in *Curfew in the City* are the victims of communal violence due to their very presence as passive objects in
the topography communally proactive elements. Thus, it is the very topography of the novels that tag these novels to be ‘novels of communal riots’.

Except for the novel *Partitions*, all the novels are written as response to actual riots took place in the different parts of the country. It means that the fictional world of the topographical structure is based on the actual world which makes these novels read like a journalistic reports disguised as literature. Besides, these novels except for *Curfew in the City* blur the fictional and factual boundaries, for the real characters, historical and political figures are brought directly to the plot to play their parts in the communal tension. It is in the topographical structure where fact meets the fiction.

**The Level of Chronotopic Structure:**

The mutual correspondence of time and space accounts for the chronotopos in literature. The events and incidents that take place in a particular space of the novels reveal various aspects of the communal violence. The chronotopos can be of varied range, as Bakhtin has suggested, macro and micro chronotopos etc. We will look at two kinds of relationships in the novels; synchronic relations and diachronic relations.

1.1 **Synchronic Relations: Motion and Rest**

At every point of the narrative, at every synchronic situation, some objects may be found at *rest* or static and others in *motion* or dynamic. Hence, it is really fascinating to read a literary text from a synchronic relations viewpoint wherein one explores the static and dynamic elements, ideas, characters etc. For example, in *Tamas* there are two pairs of characters; Shah Nawaz and Milkhi, and Ranvir and Itrafarosh. The former in each pair is dynamic to kill the latter that is static. Suranjan and Sudhamoy in *Lajja* are also static characters as against the dynamic forces of
communal violence around them. What happens to Priscilla and rape victim respectively in *Riot* and *Curfew in the City* is because they are at the wrong place at wrong time. Chronotopes tell us what could (not) have been in certain time space.

Being in rest (static) is a state of being bound to a particular spatial context sometimes by force whereas being in motion (dynamic) suggests mobility of characters or ideology among various spatial contexts (by choice or force). As in the novel *Curfew in the City*, Muslims are made static by curfew. *Riot* and *Partitions* show the mobility of communal ideology travelling across various time periods and influencing the present state of violence. Besides, in a literary text, static and dynamic elements can be replaced with each other for various requirements of the plot. For instance, nobody bothers about temples and mosques before communal instigation and hence these spaces remain static. As soon as riots erupt, they are the most dynamic spaces to be protected and for executing the violence. It is quite possible that a character or physical entity is static during a given point in time and becomes active and dynamic in the other. They are complimentary too; dynamic elements are *dynamic* due to *still* quality of the static elements and the vice versa. As communal violence takes place because there is an appropriate atmosphere ready for it. The study of these novels suggests that no riot occurs all of a sudden but as a result of the continuous tension emerging amongst the people.

1.2 **Diachronic Relations: Directions, Axes, Powers.**

Space at its topographical level is all neutral and passive with regard to direction, and one may move in it, from and to any point. It is noteworthy that communal violence is a product of the process of constant interactions of diachronic movements among social, psychological and political spaces. The characters move from one juncture of time and space to another and in
doing so they engage into communal violence. For instance, the moment Suranjan, in *Lajja*, moves from his house to his friend’s, his sister Maya gets kidnapped; such movements can be seen as mobility in space and time as causal relations. The incident of killing a pig in *Tamas* moves horizontally to entire town and causes enormous violence. Additionally, diachronic relations of space make us aware of the simultaneity of the events happenings on the axes of movements along with their points of departure and arrival, the nature of these shifts, reasons for mobility to name a few. For instance,

**Axis of movement**

![Axis of movement diagram](image)

Point of departure | Point of arrival

Space at chronotopic level is structured as a network of axes having definite directions and a definite character. Axes may or may not be determined by motions which actually take place in the world of the text. Journey which starts from point A to B can also deviate from point A to C, D or E and may or may not reach point B; in that case the dynamic nature of chronotopos is to be understood differently. For instance, in *Tamas* Shah Nawaz goes to his Hindu friend’s house in order to get golden jewelry box, he gets the box and returns to his Hindu friend’s house but in between he kills Milkhi, the servant at the home. How do we understand this axis of movement wherein a Muslim risks his life to help his Hindu friends and simultaneously kills a Hindu on communal ground? Here the axis starts from point A and reaches B but via a deviation to point C, so to say.
An actual movement of a character is the result of several factors: power, will, hurdle, ideal, character’s intentions, destiny etc. We can easily understand why Ranvir kills the scent seller, but why was the General got killed in Tamas? Why was Priscilla killed in the Riot? These are complex issues to be understood with diachronic structure. A character’s journey from one place to another might be seen as his/her dialogue with the constantly changing spaces around him/her. So, when we look at a literary text, we are more concerned with the conception of the total space in terms of a field of powers rather than focusing an occasional movement on a neutral topographical situation. As Partitions gives a detailed account of the simultaneous and chronological account of the whole issue of Babri-Ram Janmabhoomi issue; topographically Babri as a place is not that problem to cause communal violence but the field of power mechanisms spread on the web of axes of movements that nurtures the communal disturbance.

2. The Level of Textual Structure:

The level of textual structure deals with the alternative world created by the text and how this world communicates with the real world. Here, we will discuss not the linguistic space only but the space the texts open up for the new world to stand and expand. The novels dealing with communal violence have been successful in reconstructing the world; for the incidents of communal violence in the real world are so inaccessible to us in terms of time and space, the textual structure of the riots will allow us to revisit riots as many times as we wish.

2.1 The Selectivity of Language and its Effects

Principally, the writers choose to talk about some characters and events in great detail by minimizing others. In the post 1970 novels on communal riots, if we try to classify, writers have tried to talk about three types of characters: 1) communal characters that are very active in
executing and justifying the riots, 2) secular characters that are busy pacifying the violence and constantly criticizing the latent causes and 3) the victims. In order to justify these focuses, writers choose their ideological means. For example, *Lajja* is a narrative about the sufferings of Hindus caused by Muslims in Bangladesh by a Muslim writer whereas *Curfew in the City* is the mirror image of *Lajja* wherein the pitiable situation of Muslims caused by Hindus in India is depicted by a Hindu writer. *Riot* is more of an intellectual and secular discussion on the issue of communalism in India and *Tamas*, on the similar lines, is historical and sociological commentary on how people should be secular. *Partitions* chooses a secular stand but presents all forms of violence by accusing every possible agency for communal violence in India.

As a whole, these narratives present discourse of communal violence in a language most aptly chosen. The incidents of violence are described in such a way that it certainly disturbs the readers, for example killing of a pig by Nathu and a hen by Ranvir in *Tamas* are haunting images created by the language. A lengthy discussion on rapes and molestation of women in all the novels are more than sufficient evidences of targeted gender space.

### 2.2 The Linearity of the Text

One of the most striking elements of post 1970 novels on communal riots is the search for a narrative technique appropriate to articulate the traumatic space of communal violence. Not a single novel, that we are discussing, presents a linear narrative style; the very inability to find the “plotted” narrative shows the intensity of soreness of communal violence. How does one talk about such a complex and multidimensional issue of riot by employing a one-dimensional narration? The main character in all these narratives is almost the same; ‘communal violence’, but each text has different textuality to represent it.
As a part of the storyline, they depict some of the archetypal images and incidents of communal violence, for example murders of innocent, rapes, looting the property etc. But in doing so, they emphasize India’s failure in dealing with any of these incidents. *Partitions* uses local problem of communalism and partition, to talk about the global issues of different types of partitions and violence.
2.3 The Perspectival Structure:

Literary narratives are subject to their political leanings when they deal with a subject like communal violence. Generally, literary criticism dictates, a text is read by keeping in mind three types of perspectives: writer’s, textual and the reader’s perspective. A literary text is a perspective to look at the problem of communalism.

Within the perspectival structure, ‘here-there’ relationships occur in two ways: between the location of the act of narration and the “world” as a whole; and, within the “world”, between things perceived at a certain instant as in foreground and those perceived as in the background. For example, in *Tamas* killing of a pig for five rupees does not appeal to us unless it is thrown on the steps of the mosque to rouse communal tension. The incident of pig becomes the most significant one than the hitherto significant movements like freedom, congress party, Gandhi etc.; rather the latter events work as background to the former. Because the event is set as “here” and rest are sent to the space of “there”. Such shifting of focus tells us how the town can be instigated by an insignificant act. Sometimes the space of “there” is directly dragged to the space of “here” as in *Partitions*, the history of four hundred years is excavated and Babar is summoned in present time-“here” to render his testimony.

On the basis of what we have discussed on three levels of space of literary narrative, we can deduce the following tabular frame:

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<th>Level of Space</th>
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<td>Topographical Level</td>
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[Table is based on Zoran’s discussion]
A.  **Places:**

What roles do places play during communal riots? Places like houses, lanes, ghettos, religious places, markets, towns etc. have been the spaces where violence takes place. Sometimes the places are the properties for which the communities fight. For instance, except for the novel *Curfew in the City*, all novels revolve around the problem of place called Babri-Ram Janmabhoomi.

![Babri Masjid before demolition, 1992](image)

After all, it is just a place! Thousands of people have lost their lives for this place; many of them have never visited it. The literary narratives have tried to talk about the places like temples and mosques, houses and lanes as important places to take care during communal riots. In the novels like *Tamas* and *Partitions*, it is shown that such places become space of communal activities themselves. Is it possible then, to plan our cities-urban space-places in such a way that it reduces the communal riots and increase communal harmony?

B.  **A Zone of Actions:**

During communal riots, a zone of actions can be any place where enemy is found alone and helpless. In *Riot*, religious procession is the zone of action for the rioters and the police because
it is so vulnerable that a small cracker is taken as bombarding. The entire movement of demolition of Babri Masjid and the preparations for it is the zone of action where people are instigated. Strangely, *Curfew in the City* is the novel about curfew itself which is taken as a zone of action (violence) by the police! A zone of actions is a result of and cause to the events happening before and after. For instance, *Tamas* is a narrative about what happens after a pig is killed and before formations of peace committees during elections; anything can happen in the zone of action during this time. Killings, rapes, damaging temples and mosques and ponderings are the results of the actions.

**C. A Field of Vision:**

A field of vision is the point of view generated by the text. Literary texts on communalism aim at reconstructing the world by focusing certain events happening at particular zone of action and place while eliminating the other events. The choice of the events is always political, sometimes writers want to romanticize or over criticize an event that is why they make it center of our attention. For example, the rape incident is so common during the communal riots, but every writer talks about it in order to make the reading more and more gripping and disturbing. Spatially, whenever an event is brought closer to the reader’s world, that event automatically becomes significant. This can be done, as *Riot* does, by the technique of multiple narrations wherein linearity of the text-reading is broken and an organic view is provided to the reader. A field of vision is, thus, a spatial focus of “here” and “there”, in other words “foreground” and “background” of the narrative. *Partitions* too breaks the space of “there” and talks about everything in terms of “here” meaning important.
Concept of Total Space:

Total space denotes those spatial elements that no field of vision provides to the readers. In other words, they are not “shown” but “suggested”. It is impossible to imagine space as anything other than total. Post 1970 novels on communal riots are located on the total space of all the possible aspects of communalism; history, sacred, social, psychological, political etc. Space exists as a priori condition for all that follow. That is how total space exists beyond the boundary of the space presented by a literary text. Naturally, for the purpose of study we may focus on a set of thematic sections of space but at the same time we regard them as parts of a total space.

4.2 ‘Sacred Spaces’ and Violence:

What is a ‘sacred space’ and what relation does it share with violence during communal riots? Generally, ‘sacred’ denotes to something that is believed to be holy and to have a special connection with God; something connected with religion or used in religious ceremonies. Moreover, one can describe something ‘sacred’ when it is too important to be changed or interfered with. ‘Sacred space’ includes pilgrimage, temple, mosque, church etc. as the most important entities to define the self by a given religious community. Different forms of conflict are likely to occur if members of the religious community find their sacred-space either invaded or insulted. Let us discuss the relationship between ‘sacred space’ and communal violence in the select novels on communal violence.

The beginning of Tamas marks one of the archetypal patterns of space-encroachment causing eruption of unprecedented communal violence. By giving Nathu, a Chamar five rupees, Murad Ali, asks him to kill a pig for a veterinary surgeon for experimentation. Nathu kills it but next morning carcass of the pig is found at the entrance of the mosque, Khalion ki Masjid. This foul
mischief offends Muslim community and soon news of killing of cow starts floating in the communally sensitive town. A series of questions arise; why does carcass of pig thrown at mosque? How does Murad Ali, a Muslim get involved in such blasphemous act? Does it mean that he is more loyal towards his “master” than his religion? Does the “master” in the latent text play any role here?

Killing a pig is a direct attack on the ‘sacred space’ of Islam as the killing of a cow is on Hinduism. Here the pig is not only killed but it is thrown in front of the mosque. As mosque or temple is a physical centre for religious-spiritual power so to say and a religious space considered as source of people’s emotional and moral strength along with collective faith. That is why an attack on the centre certainly has repercussions at peripheral locations of the community. Hence, such an attack disturbs three layers of spaces: (1) individual space, (2) space of religiosity and (3) communal space. Individually, a person feels threatened and challenged or rather emotionally instigated; soon “my” religion is different from “yours” starts and thirdly there is a shift from “attack on my religious sentiments” to “attack on our religious sentiments by other religion i.e. members of other community”. Thus, the first thing that such incidents do is they start separating and distancing ‘our space’ from ‘their space’ which is in other words process of identity formation and assertion.

The history of communal riots between Hindus and Muslims have traumatized communal memory to such an extent that it is taken for granted that pig has been thrown at Mosque’s steps by none other than a Hindu and similarly cow-slaughtering is ascribed to Muslims. There are two aspects of thinking about ‘sacred space’; one is the collective faith and another is rational thinking. Space of collective emotions and faith dictates that the hidden enemy can go without
punishment hence the immediate victim of violence is the assumed enemy since long past i.e. Hindus for Muslim and vice-versa. The novel records incidents of killing neighbours which is nothing but the amplification of the belief that ‘sacred space’ is more important than ‘human space’ of relations. Just because religion considers certain elements as totem and some taboo, carcass of pig does not arouse violence if it is thrown at church or Gurudwara. Besides, this schema of pig/cow does not work so aggressively if there is no latent tension already existing between two communities.

The presence of carcass of pig at Mosque’s door step continuously haunts Muslims but soon some secularists feel it right to remove it and wash the space which presumes that “sacred space” is polluted and needs purification so that Muslims can enter the mosque. However, the belief that such purification does not undo contamination of the ‘sacred space’ and gives birth to revenge.

But is it just about one’s engagement with ‘sacred space’? Well, the issue of control of ‘sacred space’ needs to be addressed with a view to understand secularists’ argument regarding politics, economy and communal violence. As we observe, for Nathu there are two prime motivations behind killing the pig; five rupees and political power that Murad Ali holds. For instance, the way Murad Ali justifies his role: “people living in this area are mostly Muslims. If anyone sees it, there can be trouble. So be careful. I too don’t like getting such jobs done. But what to do? I couldn’t say no to the vet sahib” (4). As Murad Ali cannot deny vet sahib’s (which indicates to British Master’s) request (read ‘order’), Nathu cannot refuse Murad Ali’s. The involvement of the ‘master’, ‘a merchant’ and ‘a labourer’ respectively in this incident of killing a pig shows how “sacred space” has been of political interest for the rulers of all periods from colonial
period to present day. New modes of governance (ruling) brings fresh manners of regulating, controlling and manipulating ‘sacred spaces’; the worst case is that of communal riots that took place in 1969 in Ahmedabad as a result of (supposedly) slaughtering of a cow. Thus, polarization and protection of ‘sacred space’ has become the significant symbol around which communal violence can be engineered.

Secondly, illustration of ‘‘sacred space’’ as one of the potential sources for communal violence can be seen in the tenth chapter where in Shah Nawaz kills Milkhi, a servant in his Hindu friend Raghu Nath’s house. The character of Shah Nawaz seems to be a case of split personality disorder because he risks his life in order to fetch box of jewellery for Raghu Nath’s wife from their house which they had been left behind during riot. Besides, he promises to protect Raghu Nath when he says, “if anyone dares to look at my friend’s house with an evil eye, I shall catch hold of you and skin you alive” (166). But when he goes to get box of jewellery, something happens to him and he kicks Milkhi who dies soon. What makes him behave like this? When Milkhi was helping Shah Nawaz find the right key of the cupboard, writes Sahni:

Shah Nawaz’s eyes fell on the thin tuft of hair on Milkhi’s head, his chutia falling over his left ear like a centipede, and it gave him a creepy feeling…Shah Nawaz reached the cupboard which contained the jewellery box. As he looked casually out of the window he saw a large group of people sitting close to the water-tank where the devotees washed their hands and feet before offering the Namaz. Then his eyes fell on a dead body, duly covered in their midst. The scene of funeral procession which he had seen that morning on his way to Raghu Nath’s house also flitted across his mind. For long Shah Nawaz stood looking out of the window (176).

Isn’t Shah Nawaz’s mind communicating with his ‘sacred space’ or rather those incidents as mentioned above rekindles his sense of being part of a collective faith - ‘sacred space’- which is now against its counterpart Hindu ‘sacred space’? His gazing at Masjid – a physical manifestation of the ‘sacred space’ that he grew up with - stirs him and also fills in him
enormous hatred for any Hindu around him at the moment. Now, he has started believing that his
‘sacred space’ is polluted by such filthy people like Milkhi and so they must be punished.

As they came down the staircase, Milkhi was in front holding the bunch of keys while Shah
Nawaz followed with the jewellery box in both his hands, when suddenly something snapped in
Shah Nawaz’s mind… Shah Nawaz gave a sharp kick to Milkhi on his back. Milkhi stumbled
and fell head downward. As he went tumbling down, his head struck against the wall at the turn
in the staircase; his forehead split and his spine broke. When Shah Nawaz came down the
staircase, Milkhi’s head was hanging downward from one of the last steps in the stair case. Shah
Nawaz was still in rage, the spurt of anger had not subsided. Coming down the staircase, as he
passed by Milkhi’s body, he felt like lifting his foot and hitting Milkhi on the face so as to crush
the centipede (177).

From where does such enormous hatred and anger come to Shah Nawaz’s mind? Answer to this
question unfolds a set of psychological layers of communal space and violence that it generates.
On his way to Raghu Nath’s house, Shah Nawaz, was constantly identifying himself with
members of his community and gradually such feeling was getting filled in his mind. When he
saw Masjid from the open window, that was the culmination point, he actually opened the
suppressed ‘sacred space’ (many pseudo secularists suppress their allies with their ‘sacred
space’) which worked as stimuli to his violent behaviour. A large group of people of his
community gathered for mourning at a person’s death, it awakens Shah Nawaz’s guilty feeling
that he should do something in/by his ‘individual space’ in order to compensate loss at
‘communal space’ and as a result he kills Milkhi. Nevertheless, Milkhi’s Hindu identity marker
plays vital role in adding to Shah Nawaz’s temporal rage.

The dead body that Shah Nawaz saw aroused in him ‘violence instinct’ which was directed to
Milkhi. Shah Nawaz’s connection with his ‘sacred space’ not only arouses violence instinct but
also deadens his rational sense. He has come to help his friend who is (also) a Hindu the same
way as Milkhi is. After offering his communal duty to his community, he returns to Raghu
Nath’s house to render the jewellery box as a satisfied member of a community. Unlikely, he
does not see any event of communal violence in his way back which tells us that so far he did not participate in ‘communal space’, all the events were actually inviting him to take part in violence. After killing Milkhi, he seems to be liberated from the burden of communally sensitive ‘sacred space’. There can be another interpretation i.e. during communal violence collective ‘sacred space’ is both vulnerable for manipulation and victimizer for stimulating even secularists: respectively like that of throwing carcass of pig at Mosque and when Shah Nawaz gets instigated by mere gaze at the ambiance of Masjid!

Thirdly, it is but inevitable to understand what role does physical form of ‘sacred space’ play during communal violence. *Tamas* is an exemplary novel in describing real life picture of preparation of the riot. For example, soon after the news of dead pig at the Mosque, we find Vanprasthaji, a spiritual Hindu leader gets very excited and agitated as he cites an inflammatory couplet along with so many other spiritual hymns in the temple:

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Much blighted has this land been by
The sins of the Muslims, even the
Divine has refused us this grace
And the earth its bounty (73)
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After that, a lot of planning regarding protection starts when someone shares the news of how Muslims have started gathering weapons in the Mosque. All these preparations for the riot take place in the ‘sacred space’ of the religion. On the other hand, communal space is widening across Gurudwara and Mosque with equal density. The communal dichotomy between Sikh in the Gurudwara and Muslims in the Mosque has different communal color here; on one hand it is like any other riot but on other it has a prolonged history of religious war. Wherever there is tension between Sikhs and Muslims that history of self-sacrifice for one’s religion is fetched from the
remote past. For example, fifteenth chapter describes how people gather in a Gurudwara consider this riot as continuous part of Khalsa and Turk war:

The rhapsody expressing sentiments of supreme self-sacrifice was once again being heard after a lapse of centuries. Three hundred years earlier, a similar ‘war song’ used to be sung by the Khalsa before taking on the enemy. Oblivious of everything they sang, imbued with the spirit of sacrifice. In this unique moment, their souls had merged, as it were, with souls of their ancestors. Time had again come to cross swords with the Turks. The Khalsa was again facing a crisis created by the Turks. Their minds had been transported to those earlier times (228).

Sahni’s description shows how ‘sacred spaces’ like Gurudwara becomes centers for electrifying the sense of belonging to a religious community and one must sacrifice one’s life for the protection of the community by the virtue of his/her membership. If one does not fight for the community, in any way one will be killed by other community by the same virtue of one’s membership. Hence, there are two options of self-directed violence here; self-sacrifice for the community or suicide. The word ‘sacrifice’ has a glorified meaning in the ‘sacred space’ which can be remembered for years in order to use it to instigate next generation for the same. On the other side also the situation was similar, in Sheikh’s house the Muslims were storing weapons and they had assumed the role of mujahids, and preparations were going on to launch a Jihad against the Kafirs. The spirit of sacrifice was ruling entire atmosphere. A small beginning was ready to bring about killings of hundreds of lives. ‘Jo Bole So Nihar-Sat Shri Akal’ can be heard from the Gurudwara and ‘Nara-i-Takbir-Allah-o-Akbar’ would be reciprocated. These typical religious slogans not only excite people for war but also pierce into each other’s collective communal spaces. The way Ranvir remembers Shivaji and Mararana Pratap’s bravery against Mughal Sultanate suggests his initiation to hate and fight against Muslims of his day. Thus, communal space is always fostered by space of glorified religious histories.
We observe in the novel that time and again all ‘sacred spaces’; temple, mosque and gurudwara are manipulated during riots in three different topographical manners. Firstly, these spaces are ‘localized spaces’ that is why they are always there in the consciousness of the people of all communities and so can be easily attacked. Secondly, they are materially ‘confined spaces’ i.e. in a limited geographical area so they can be used to store weapons or hide people. Lastly, they are religiously ‘identified spaces’ and that is precisely why they are destroyed. One can also consider spatial analysis of various religious symbols, processions, colors, music etc. and their place in the above mentioned ‘sacred spaces’.

*Tamas* has only two characters, victims of a riot, who choose life-space over ‘sacred space’. The character of Iqbal Singh, son of Harman Singh, is forced to convert as a Muslim for his life; after removal of his hair, he is forced to eat meat, forced to recite Kalama followed by the performance of circumcision ceremony. These changes made him Iqbal Ahmed from Iqbal Singh. As Sahni concludes this conversion:

> By the time evening fell, all the marks of Sikhism on Iqbal Singh’s person had been replaced by the marks of the Muslim faith. A mere change of marks had brought about the transformation. Now he was no longer an enemy but a friend, not a Kafir but a believer; to whom the doors of all Muslim houses were open (281).

One really ponders over how some changes in the identity can really grant one a new life! And what we call ‘sacred space’ is nothing but sum total of these identity markers which can be easily superimposed and with some trouble can be accepted also. Similar concept of identity markers can be found in the dialogue between Richard and Liza when Richard explains how he can differentiate a Hindu from a Muslim, “From his name, the cut of his beard; he offers namaz. Even his eating habits are different…The names of Muslims end with such suffixes as Ali, Din, Ahmed, whereas the names of Hindus end with Lal, Chand or Ram…” (43). Therefore, one’s
sense of being religious highly depends on his/her readiness to either wear or remove religious markers. This incident opens a new debate on the power of collective space during communal riots. For instance, had Iqbal Singh been in a Gurudwara with other Sikhs, he would have fought and happily died but since he was all alone he preferred to succumb for conversion and not to die. Hence, the space of death is diverted through one’s change in the location of ‘sacred space’.

Another character is that of Prakasho who is kidnapped by a Muslim named Allah Rakha. He forces her to marry him and she does. Gradually, she accepts it as her fate and starts loving her husband. We are not told whether she gets converted but there are two reasons that make us believe in her conversion; one is that traditionally wives take on her husband’s religion and another is, if Iqbal Singh can be made converted, Prakasho can also be “made” by hook or crook. Suppose, like Iqbal Singh, had Prakasho been in the Gurudwara with other women she would have jumped into the well like Jasbir Kaur, Iqbal Singh’s sister. But she chooses life space over suffering, rape and death.

*Lajja* operates the ‘sacred’ on a totally different plane of communal space; here it is not one of the aspects of communal violence but the core cause of it. The novel is based on the reports on communal riots erupted in Bangladesh during different times of history, especially after the demolition of Babari Masjid in 1992. It argues that the whole communal problem can be sourced to the conversion of Bangladesh from a democratic country to constitutional acceptance of Islam as a state religion. Hence, *Lajja* as it seems, assumes ‘sacred space’ as an active force to push communal violence across. In the exposition of the novel, there is a quote of Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad on how Islam, as a ‘sacred space’, does not guarantee unity:

> It is one of the greatest frauds on the people to suggest that religious affinity can unite areas which are geographically, economically, linguistically and culturally different. It is true that
Islam sought to establish a society which transcends racial, linguistic, economic and political frontiers. History has however proved that after the first decades or at the most after the first century, Islam was not able to unite the Muslim countries on the basis of Islam alone (8).

Such a statement of Maulana Azad implies and in fact anticipates the communal turmoil that Bangladesh is likely to face as long as it believes in the ‘uniting’ phenomenon of the ‘sacred space’ of Islam. All religions attempt to absolutize the reality and in doing so, negates absolutization of its ‘co-sacred spaces’. Strangely, the issue of conversion, as we have discussed in *Tamas*, plays a very significant role in understanding ‘sacred’ and ‘violence’ because conversion is nothing but a ritual through which one can leave one’s ‘sacred space’ and becomes member of the other ‘sacred space’. So, while Maya is leaving her house due to lukewarm attitude of her brother Suranjan about the family’s safety, she is asked about her future plans and she says, "*la ilaha illalahu Muhammadun Rasulullah*” is all you need to say to become a Muslim. That’s just what I’ll do, and I will call myself Feroza Begum” (12). In fact such a conversion of ‘sacred space’ can save one’s life; if one refuses to change one’s ‘sacred space’, it can be fatal. Here ‘sacred space’ means a set of religious rites and rituals and wearing identity markers. These are sufficient parameters by which one becomes enemy of the other community and may become victim/victimizer during communal violence.

There is yet another conflict, between the ‘sacred space’ and the ‘secular space’. In Bangladesh if one subscribes to secularist ideology as a Muslim, one is a traitor, and if one is a Hindu and believes in secularism, the person a is double enemy. So, either one can be a Muslim - ‘sacred space’ of the majority or a Hindu - ‘sacred space’ of the minority. For example, the protagonist Suranjan is a secularist Hindu, he suffers because he is Hindu, not by choice and a secularist by choice. During his school time, once during the quarrel his classmate Khaled refers to him as a Hindu.
Suranjan was sure that the word Hindu was as derogatory as swine or dog. It was only after he had grown up somewhat that he had learned that Hindu was a noun describing the religious community to which he belonged. When he was old enough to make up his mind on the matter he declared that he was above all, first, a human being and then a Bengali by race. No religion had created this race and he wanted people to know no communal barriers, and live together in perfect harmony… (But) rather unity was sought not between people of the same nation, but between people of the same religion, even if they lived in two different countries (25).

What this indicates to is a postulation that even the project of nationalism can easily be carried away by communal politics. Just by establishing ‘sacred space’ as a uniting force in and outside the country, the gulf between Hindus and Muslims is being widened every day. Such ‘sacred space’ is a tool by which Muslims in Bangladesh exploit the Hindus of the country and with the same tool Muslims in India are exploited by Hindus. Thus, the concept of the ‘sacred space’ is dynamic and relative notion. Further, the dynamic nature of ‘sacred space’ also accounts for the psychological impacts on the masses. For example, Suranjan argues that, “They are angry when a mosque is destroyed, don’t they realize that Hindus will just be as angry when temples are destroyed? Just because one mosque has been demolished must they destroy hundreds and hundreds of temples? Doesn’t Islam profess peace (55)?” Interestingly, Suranjan is trying to rationalize the ‘sacred space’ without considering the parallel psychological space. For him physical structures do not account for the ‘sacred space’ and that is why it simply does not stir him even a bit but his mother’s worship of idols becomes something unbearable for him. “For once, he feels like throwing God’s idol too” (83).

Interestingly, Lajja complicates the issue of ‘sacred’ and ‘secularism’ by juxtaposing them; by making some character argue for either of the belief/ideology. For example, Birupaksha asks Suranjan, “you don’t believe in religion, right? I know that you don’t pray, and you don’t eat beef as well. Why don’t you tell them you are not a pure Hindu, that you are half Muslim (94)?” The concept of ‘sacred’ is commonly seen as one’s religious inclinations and external aspects of
the religious practice. Not only that, if a person does not follow the commonly accepted way of a given religious community, s/he becomes “impure” and automatically starts belonging to the enemy religious community. So, there is no individual choice of defining and practicing the sacred. One wonders if such a naïve understanding of ‘sacred space’ amongst the masses is not the zone of action for communal violence.

Mistaking ‘sacred’ by ‘religion’, keeps on recurring throughout the discourse Suranjan indulges himself in order to decode the problem of communalism in Bangladesh. Writer’s Marxist critique on the relationship between religion and society is worth noticing:

Religion had forced itself so strongly on the social firmament that it would be very difficult for the impoverished, weak and tortured people of the Third World to escape its iron grip. He remembered one of Karl Marx’s sayings, one of his favorites—“Problems relating to religion are actually a manifestation of practical shortcomings, as also a protest against them. Religion is the sigh of the tortured and the prosecuted, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the soul of a soulless society. Religion is the opium of the masses” (133-34).

A secularist and Marxist is likely to condemn the institutionalized religion and by doing so one is actually pointing to the re-establishment of the ‘religion’ as ‘sacred’ among the masses for its constructive roles. There is yet another instance when the Marxist viewpoint of changing social attitude toward religion when Suranjan says:

Let all the brick-built buildings of worship be smashed to smithereens. Let there be no mandirs, masjids, girjas and gurudwaras, and after they are all destroyed, we will build on their ruins beautiful flower gardens and schools for children. For the good of man, the places of worship should be hospitals, orphanages, schools and universities. From now onwards let the prayer homes be Art and Handicrafts Academies, Schools of Fine Arts, Halls for Scientific Discussions. Let our places of worship be converted into rich green, sun-bathed paddy fields, vast rolling fields, gurgling blue rivers and wild unquiet oceans. Let the other name of Religion be Humanity (163-64).

One would like to listen to such humanitarian idea of religion for a very long time but it lacks one of the basic constituents of the religion and that is ‘sacredness’. Destroying of places of worship and then establishing new places of worship is actually going against the very
constructive idea of the ‘sacred’. One’s goals can be sacred but if one’s means are not sacred, the ultimate ‘sacred’ is either temporarily achieved or not at all achieved.

*Riot* deals with the issue of ‘sacred’ from multiple perspectives; questioning it, (re)establishing it, justifying it, secularizing it, historicizing it etc. The novel uses technique of multiple narratives in order to unfold the murder mystery of Priscilla. We have Lakshman, District Magistrate, explaining how the ‘sacred’ aspect of Hinduism helps in encouraging social space, “because everyone basically believes their suffering in this life is the result of misdeeds in a past one, and their miseries in this world will be addressed in the next if only they’d shut up and be good and accept things as they, injustices included” (43).

Subtly, it submits the popular notion about Hinduism i.e. tolerance and by that negates the active participation in violence. As if a Hindu is saying ‘see, our sacred sense does not allow to attack, if you attack and we suffer, it is because ‘misdeed’ we committed in the past’. Therefore, the character seems to eliminate any active role of Hindus during communal riots just by the virtue of being ‘sacred’, a Hindu is assumed to be not-guilty. Nevertheless one would like to argue if this is not an ideological bending of the ‘sacred space’!

The controversy of Ram Janmabhoomi and Babri Masjid is the centre the entire narrative revolves around. Time and again, the Hindu nationalists or Hindu chauvinists, a Muslim Historian, secularists are brought to discuss their version of truth. In doing so, we have some fresh dimensions of the ‘sacred’. A character called Ram Charan Gupta, known as Hindu fanatic tells Randy Diggs, an American journalist:

In Ayodhya there are many temples to Ram. But the most famous temple is not really a temple anymore. It is the Ram Janmabhoomi, the birthplace of Ram. A site for a grand temple you might think. But of you go to Ayodhya, you will see non Ram Janmabhoomi temple there. In
olden days a great temple stood there. A magnificent temple. Pilgrims from all over India would come to worship Ram there. But a Muslim king, the Mughal emperor Babar, not an Indian, a foreigner from Central Asia, he knocked it down. And in its place he built a big mosque, which was named after him, the Babri Masjid. Can you imagine? A mosque on our holiest site! Muslims praying to Mecca on the very spot where our divine Lord Ram was born (52)!

People have always identified and established places and monuments as their ‘sacred spaces’ for worshiping their deities from the time immemorial. As the time passes, these ‘sacred spaces’ become parts of the collective unconscious of a given community. Thus, a ‘sacred space’ exists simultaneously on some physical space and in the mind of the people. If these ‘sacred spaces’ are attacked by the believers of different faith, psychological ‘sacred space’ of people get disturbed and they tend to become communal and violent. The belief that Muslims have attacked the ‘sacred space’ of Hindus is likely to cause violence on massive scale and the vice versa. As against secularists’ views and proofs about Babri Masjid not being built on Ram Janmabhoomi or the Ram Janmabhoomi does not exist historically (see below Historical Space and Violence), do not stand guard on what people ‘believe’ about it.

Erecting a Mosque over temple seemed to be a kind of zeal to establish superiority of Islamic ‘sacred space’ over the Hindu ‘sacred space’ to which Hindus were to reacted, opposed and fought. These replacements also served as the considerable portion of people’s historical memory of ‘sacred space’ that now their ‘sacred space’ is not just a space for offering prayers and religious rituals but a communal space; space of protection and revenge. Ram Charan Gupta further argues, “Would Muslims be happy if some Hindu king had gone and build a temple to Ram in Mecca” (53)? Needless to say that such a situation is vulnerable to political manipulations and exploits. Violence works through ‘sacred space’ and by political means.
Political space triggers people’s psychological sense of the ‘sacred’ wherein the historical memory of attack already exists, it simply provokes to that ‘sacred space’ through inflammatory slogans, hate speeches, processions etc. and people are easily carried away by the provocations. It is in this context that the controversy of Ram Janmabhoomi is brought back for political reasons, then communal violence takes place and entire social space gets scattered.

The entire movement to demolish Babri Masjid and build Ram Janmabhoomi temple has been carried out by collecting bricks from all parts of the country followed a “sacred” procession to Ayodhya with all kinds of weapons. As Lakshman tries to convince the leaders of the procession to change their route:

The route you are planning to take for your procession is dangerous. It goes right through Muslim mohallas, and in two places passes right in front of Muslim mosques. Some Muslims will take this as provocation, and I must say, I can’t disagree with them. You will simply incite some of the hotheads in doing something…(61).

This is exemplary of the facts we could see in so many riots in India. In most of the religious processions and festivals, the only danger is that people get so excited about celebrating their ‘sacred space’ that they forget they are destroying the similar ‘sacred’ elements of others. It deals with the collective psychological realms of the ‘sacred space’. On the other hand, there is a constant juxtaposition of the ‘sacred’ and ‘rationality’. For instance, Ram Charan Gupta and Prof. Mohammed Sarwar tell to Randy Diggs respectively:

What is more important, Mr. Diggs, is that millions of devout Hindu have no doubt either. To them this accursed mosque occupies the most sacred site in Hinduism, our Ram Janmabhoomi. Who cares what proof these leftist historians demand when so many believe they know the truth? Our faith is the only proof we need. (121).

And Professor argues:

The likes of Ram Charan Gupta have not the slightest doubt that their Lord Rama was born at the Ram Janmabhoomi, and what’s more at the precise spot they call Ram Janmasthan-not ten
yards away, not ten feet away...The Ramayana existed as a text, as an epic, for about a thousand years before anyone began treating it as sacred. There is no evidence of any temple being built to worship Rama anywhere in India before the tenth century A.D. (182).

What is interesting to note, here, is that this debate has been going on for decades now, thousands of people have died and been killed for the “place” they believe to be ‘sacred space’. People having faith in the sacred and would want others to believe in the same, will always try to rationalize the ‘sacred space’. And those who do not believe unless there is a proof will try to find out irrationality of the ‘sacred space’. What makes any place a ‘sacred space’; idols, temples, mosques, beliefs, history? How do people create and protect their ‘sacred spaces’?

These questions are explored neatly in Riot.

Riot also explains why is it necessary to understand the sacred-space by compromising neither the rationality of secularism nor irrationality of faith. Lakshman is an elite Hindu Indian who has articulated what it means to be a Hindu:

And I am happy to describe myself as a believing Hindu, not just because it is the faith into which I was born, but for a string of other reasons, though faith requires no reason. One is cultural; as a Hindu I belong to a faith that expresses the ancient genius of my own people. Another is, for lack of a better phrase, its intellectual “fit”: I am more comfortable with the belief structures of Hinduism than I would be with those of the other faiths of which I know. As a Hindu I claim adherence to a religion without an established church or priestly papacy, a religion whose rituals and customs I am free to reject, a religion that does not oblige me to demonstrate my faith by any visible sign, by subsuming my identity in any collectivity, not even by a specific day or time or frequency of worship (144).

Same is true, more or less, with the other faiths only if we get people like Lakshman to interpret it that way. ‘Sacred space’ cannot be considered the source of violence provided people understand the secular spirit of the ‘sacred space’. Riot shows that a person can be secular without debunking his/her religious affinities, however, people like Lakshman are always criticized by Ram Charan Gupta. Both believe in the ‘sacred space’ that Hinduism offers but still
they stand opposites; for one, religion and sacred are one and for other they are separate. In *Riot*, ‘sacred space’ becomes a historical notion to be manipulated by the political space.

*Partitions* employs an epic scale covering various dimensions of violence in general and communal violence in particular. In the novel Kamleshwar questions the role of sacred and secular in bringing about communal violence and in doing so he explores historical spaces, political spaces, socio-psychological spaces etc. The way we understand the history and discourse on violence related to Babri-Ram Janmabhoomi, has been shaped by the constantly changing idea of ‘sacred’ in course of time. During the oral testimony of Babar on his role in demolishing Ram Janmabhoomi, he argues:

> At that time, Krishna had been accepted as an incarnation of the gods. His birthplace was Mathura, just fifty miles from Agra. If I were bent on destruction, wouldn’t I have ground to dust Krishna’s birthplace? Why would I have gone to Ayodhya to demolish Ram’s birthplace? Ram became a god only after Tulsidas, who was a child during my lifetime, wrote Ramayana. And that was after my death (58).

Isn’t it fascinating to study how ‘sacred space’ has been fluid; changing its center from time to time? If we believe in what Babar is saying, this has historical base too, a new ‘sacred space’ has been created by political space and it was superimposed in the cultural psyche of Hindus of recent times. Significantly, considering Ram as the center of Hinduism at whatever time is in itself an error in the ‘sacred space’ of Hinduism which does not have any one God/deity at its center. It is founded on the very strong idea of multiplicity of faiths and beliefs. Hence, the entire discourse on the Babri-Ram Janmabhoomi has tried to homogenize the heterogeneous ‘sacred space’ of Hinduism. Therefore, it is not only unfair but misleading also to say that if the birthplace of Ram is destroyed, it is an attack on the entire ‘sacred space’ because there is no *one* entire ‘sacred space’ in Hinduism! The violence on the issue of Babari-Ram Janmabhoomi has not been created by the ‘sacred space’ but rather by the “appropriation” of that space.
‘Sacred space’ wherein Hinduism operates itself is not only about having a God as the center of faith, it is a composite notion consisting of a wide range of scriptures, rites and rituals, customs and traditions, sages and seers etc. The tradition of ‘sacred space’ and also the secular traditions have allowed regular contestation of the very elements of the sacred. For example, Salma, Adib’s beloved argues

Your Upanishads had tried to protect human values and wealth. The Upanishads, however, were nothing but writings that on the poly of the re-establishing faith in divinity condoned misconduct within the parameters of the caste system and encouraged the kind of tyranny that was practiced on society by the Brahmins. Though they were read as scriptures advocating penitence, the Upanishads merely ended up protecting Aryans of noble descent…The roots of culture lie in religion, but with passage of time, culture liberates itself from the shackles of faith and takes on a humanitarian aspect. Yet, you and your kind constantly try to drag culture back to religion (93-94).

There has been continuous questioning to the sacred texts by the secularists who have been interpreting them from, by and large, Marxist perspectives. However, such contestation loses it’s validity on the ground of misinterpretation of the ‘sacred’ as ‘religious’ and “religious” as something related to the God. The Upanishads seem to show religious, right conduct, way of life on the basis of the sound philosophical dialogue. They cannot be simply considered to be tools of oppression under caste system. Religions are above caste system and sacred is above religion. Later in the novel, the same Salma seems to understand the proper meaning of the sacred when she says, “My abbu has explained to me that the very creation of Pakistan is sin from the point of view of Islam. There is no place for hatred in Islam yet, the very foundation of Pakistan is built on hatred. A religion like Islam cannot be confined to nation, no religion can be shackled (101)”.

Sacred negates creation of any nation on the basis of religion. Therefore, the wretched condition of Pakistan is because of the inherent paradox caused by the weak understanding of the ‘sacred’.
The novel depicts how over a period of time humans have given form of religion to the abstract notion of ‘sacred’. For instance, Hazariprasad Dwivedi tells other writers:

The *mithak* was a supernatural tale depicting man’s first encounter with nature. Man then resolved to transform it. So, he made it divine and immortal. These ancient tales, songs and ballads which began as an oral tradition, gradually evolved into ancient history. From the latter emerged the narrative of faiths and philosophies which, in turn, gave birth to the narrow confines of different religions (85).

Such a secular idea claims that all religions are products of one source, “divine” and “immortal” which brings all the faiths and their versions on the common ground. The echo of this thesis can be heard in the optimism that one day all religions will unite to offer their prayer to the same God:

Only when the burden of suffering is equally apportioned to all human beings will the habitants of this planet worship one god. This god will come to mean far more than the imageless, final arbiter of disputes. He will become the everlasting core of happiness for all mankind. Transcending the confines of visual form, he will evolve in to manifestation of benign Truth. Like the family elder from whom all seek advice, this god will be an integral part of every household (224).

This actually tries to define the ‘sacred’ and visualizes the form. The problem starts when a faith tries to prove to be the best and only authentic way to attain the Almighty and does everything to be the powerful. In doing so, frequently whatever elements that other faith stands upon become vulnerable as if destroying them would possibly destroy “their” God (who is falsely considered to be different from one’s). For instance, in the Adib’s court we see unremitting war between Hindus and Muslims about attack on their ‘sacred spaces’:

The voice from Kashi exclaimed, ‘The Kashi Vishwanath Mandir has been destroyed! It’s gone! This Mughal king has attacked Hindus! He has waged war on us and on Hindus!’

‘Revenge! Retribution!’
‘Har har Mahadev!’
‘Allah-o-Akbar!’ (157).

These attacks taken as assaults on people’s psychological ‘sacred’ sense which is identical with the physical one and they are also taken as open incitement for religious war even if they are not
sometimes. When we look at the language of this dialogue, we realize a semantic error: “Mughal king has attacked Hindus!” simply means a king has attacked a group of people. However, people make it communal by adding “Mughal” before king and using proper noun “Hindus” for the collective noun. Here, the temple is attacked by the Mughal king not by a king who is a crusader of Islam. Thus, language used during communal violence instigates more than the actual incident. The centers of worships are always first targets during communal riots because that is how one can do more harm to the sacred of the other. *Partitions* puts forth an opposite argument also, Shibli Nomani:

During that era mandirs and masjids were no longer mere centers of worship and religious discourse. They have degenerated into hotbeds of intrigue and conspiracy. Iranian, Hindustani and English historians were mistaken in their assumption that the demolition of mandirs has incited rebellions. On the contrary, it was to quash rebellions that temples were pulled down (161).

It is difficult to say that mandirs and masjids became centers for conspiracy before attacks on them. May be because people feel “nearer” to the God or in the ‘sacred space’, they feel encouraged and excited that they used these spaces for intrigues. However, as we have seen in *Tamas* that ‘sacred space’ of temple or gurudwara becomes more vulnerable because it renders both the God of the enemies and the enemies themselves to the attackers. On the contrary, the attacks on the sacred strengthen ‘sacred sense’ of the people and add wounded memories in their collective memory which will encourage them in the next riots.

Recurrently, people are obsessed with the “proper” ways in which one should observe certain rituals, offer prayers etc. and in every religion there are people who know the nature of the sacred and preach others. As Dara talks about the right directions to pray:

Both east and west belong to Allah. Whichever direction you face, there will you find Him. Faith or virtue is not served by the particular direction one faces when offering namaz. What truly matters is one’s faith in Allah, the conviction that judgement for one’s deeds awaits in the
afterlife, and respect for all sacred texts, prophets and angels. Such was the Holy Prophet’s message (233).

Again, we have a secular understanding of the sacred which argues for more than one God and sacred texts and ways to attain Him. *Partitions* espouses that people do not understand true aspects of the ‘sacred’ and fight for them; to the extent that they kill one another. Sacred has always been a great source for the collective efforts and people are protective about their ‘sacred spaces’, if need be they can be violent also.

Communal violence takes place when people do not understand the true spirit of the ‘sacred space’ because if they do, they become neither aggressive nor violent. For, they should know that ‘sacred space’ cannot be destroyed just by damaging temples/mosques. ‘Sacred space’ is simultaneously located in the past, present and future, in the memory of an individual and community, in the scriptures, monuments and traditions. The good part is, as we have seen in the post 1970 novels that people are developing some secular sense of the sacred but the process is so slow and there are sizable numbers of people who work in the opposite direction. Precisely, post 1970 India witnessed communal violence due to the latter kind of people who keep on rekindling the flame of communalism for shabby politics.

4.3 ‘Historical Spaces’ and Communal Violence:

Who has access to India’s history? Answers to this pertinent question have liberated history, both as an object of past and a method of inquiry, from the clutches of hegemonic practices. Subsequently, it has given birth to so many contesting histories, women’s history, dalits’ history, black’s history to name a few. Here, the argument challenges postmodernist idea of celebrating fragments over grand narrative. If “grand history” is a problem; the fragmented and contesting
histories are bigger problems. However, this hypothesis neither justifies silencing of many minor voices nor the process of “othering” by the grand narrative.

Let us discuss ‘history’ as a time space that serves necessary weapons of documents, real or otherwise, to organize communal violence as presented in post 1970’s Indian novels. History is the strong link between social spaces and political spaces because all social institutions and their interactions are based on certain historical events as well as all political ideologies and their practices are products of historical vicissitudes.

Time and again there are excavation into realms of collective memory and particular examples are brought in the present day life, few individuals are quoted and misquoted, saga of sacrifice is sung like holy hymns in order to provoke communal violence. Tamas can be read as a historical text but not as a historical document. Tamas deals with (a) colonial history, (b) partition and (c) history of communal riots.

When Hegel said ‘India has no history’ perhaps what he meant was India does not know how to manipulate history. For instance, Richard, a deputy commissioner tells his wife Liza about Indian’s knowledge about their history, “these people only know what we tell them, most people have no knowledge of their history. They only live it” (41). If we follow this logic of Richard, we can say that British told us what we never were. When Sahni makes Liza unravel the secrets of colonial rulers, she says to her husband, “In the name of freedom they fight against you, but in the name of religion you make them fight with one another” (50). Clever Richard then reveals the core of colonial rulers when he replies, “rulers have their eyes only on differences that divide their subjects, not on what unites them” (51).
A couple of interesting facts need be understood when we look at how *Tamas* operationalizes ‘historical space’. Primarily, it is located in a communally very sensitive historical space of partition of India. Bhishm Sahni witnessed communal riots in March 1947 in his home town Rawalpindi when 120 villages were affected by violence for 5-6 days. Sahni writes about *Tamas* in his autobiography, “my intention was neither to give historical account of that time nor to write a documentary novel…I actually wanted to record reactions of people of various religions, classes and their deeds, nothing else”⁴. However, he also notes that, “Britishers used the biggest weapon of communalism in order to break the back bone of freedom fight movement soon after Quit India Movement in 1942”⁵ (428, *Aaj Ke Atit*). Chamanlal observes:

> It is a historical fact that there is no reference to any communal violence or tension before British colonialism in India. Not even in Ayodhya/Faizabad where Hindu communal organizations claim that Baber had built Babri Mosque on the birth place of lord Rama. All these places have been contaminated by the British historians and the place which had peaceful history of a century got converted into permanent communal furnace. There is no proof of nay communal tension before 1855 despite the Jajiya text and all narratives of communal Aurangzeb and others⁶.

Hence, Sahni travels from 1857 conflict to establishment of Congress and Muslim League to partition time in order to show how this long time space of Indian history nurtured communal tension. The success of *Tamas* lies in its projection of social space and political within historical space wherein the common culprit from colonial space is brought to the lime light. As the character of Bakshi states at last, “This is the role of the British have played-they first bring about a riot and then quell it; they starve the people first and then give them bread; they render them homeless and then provide shelter to them…British had again had the last word (307).”

At various places in the novel, Jarnail talks about the dirty role of Englishmen in communal violence, for example just before he was killed he said, “Sahiban, Hindus and Musalmans are brothers. There is rioting in the city; fires are raging and there is no one to stop it. The Deputy
Commissioner is sitting in his bungalow, with his madam in his arms. I say, our real enemy is the Englishman. Gandhiji says that it is the Englishman who makes us fight one another” (190).

Thus, the issue of colonial space is frequently brought to forth in order to explain two aspects; one is why we had communal riots during Partition and another is why we still have communal riots in India, in places like Bhawandi which was the stimuli for writing Tamas. No event of past is detached from the present context and perhaps that is why the study of ‘historical space’ becomes inevitably significant. As we saw examples of Sikhs and Muslims in our discussion of ‘sacred space’, they too were fighting with a heavy historical space in the mind. For example, Sahni describes, “This confrontation too was looked upon as a link in the chain of earlier confrontations in history. The ‘warriors’ had their feet in the twentieth century while their minds were in medieval times”(282). Therefore, one of the strongest reasons for communal violence is this split of ‘historical space’ which can be ‘used’ anytime by anybody to appease political spaces.

In order to explore historical space in Lajja, Riot and Partitions, we need to understand the debates and stakes on Babri Masjid and Ram Janmabhoomi. When we look at Babri as a historical space, it does not remain just at its material or geographical level but is expanded at so many other levels and layers of spaces. For example, political space, communal space, religious space, social space, academic space, artistic/literary space, cognitive and behavioural spaces. Here, an attempt is made to question and complicate the dual relationship between history as an object of investigation and historical perspective. To study it with special reference to Babri controversy, we will take examples from Shashi Tharoor’s Riot, Kamleshwar’s Kitne Pakistan and Taslima Nasrin’s Lajja.
History as an agency to revisit the past that moulds our present and future subsequently is to be questioned radically. Since Babri has taught us lessons about what happens if history as a discourse tries to overlap history as knowledge: the former deals with narrative aspects of history including hermeneutics of collective past by the “writers-historians” whereas the latter accounts for “an autonomous domain in the spectrum of the human and physical sciences.”ymOne of the many reasons why history becomes a vulnerable space, as it seems, is its being accessible for multiple re-visits by multiple owners and agencies i.e. for example we have Buddhist, Jaina, Hindu, Muslim claims on the controversial site and they all have their respective evidences.

It is only when one becomes aware of the distance between the past and its representation, and one’s own position in that trajectory, one starts messing up history. Subjectivity overlaps objectivity while representing past and if the distance is too much, one cannot afford to be objective simply because it is not possible. For example, Babri Mosque was built in early 16th century and the revisiting it started somewhere in the 20th century and this time distance has complicated the problem. Hayden White argues that because historical discourse is a “form of fiction-making operation, the knowledge it offers is of the same nature as the knowledge transmitted by myths or literature.” That is why we study this duality of fiction as history and the other way round. As Michel de Certeau has written, “Historiography (that is, ‘history’ and ‘writing’) bears within its own name the paradox-almost an oxymoron - of a relation established between two opposite terms, between the real and discourse. However, for us, the question is not whether whatever is presented in the discourse is fact or fiction, but how powerful the discourse is in convincing its readers.
The historical discourse of Babri is fluctuating between two disciplinary paradoxes: history as knowledge and history as discourse. We have always tried to see what history says about our socio-cultural make up (as a social commentary) rather than looking at it in terms of what it does as a social institution (as a functional agency). This is precisely true in Indian society wherein people live with history in their day to day life. Also, we need to ponder over from where and how does history attain so much of power that a few documents can destroy another history? Is it simply politics that supports such history? Or is it bigger game of our cultural reality that we are reluctant to accept perils of ‘unity in diversity’ and which is actually ‘disarray in (historical) diversity.’

The critics like Ashish Nandy are of the opinion that “in a civilization where there are many pasts, encompassing many bitter memories and animosities, to absolutize them with the help of the European concept of history is to attack the organizing principles of the civilization.” So, according to such thinkers we need to have indigenous historical perspective that can possibly discipline inherent diversities of our culture. But how do we invent such a unique perspective in a situation where the very people who want to solve phoenix riddle are themselves victims of some or the other historical wrong/s? Roger Chartier, in this respect raises a very interesting question, “does it follow that historical scholarship is only a theatre of erudition that does not guarantee the possibility that history can produce adequate knowledge of the past?” If that happens, it could help us in solving something extremely problematic today.

Most of the times any revisiting of history leads to some kind of construction or reconstruction of the past, but considering Babri controversy, history causes its own destruction. There is only one thing that this historical excavation has constructed; a strong wall of hatred between two
communities. Curiously enough, someone may ask, ‘why to talk about a violent past after 20 years?’ The answer would be why not? Though it is painful, fear of not reopening old wound would lead us to ahistorical society. In any case, in the larger historical viewpoint the span of 20 years is as good as a day. Seeing Babri controversy, it seems communities do not really fight for the space of land but the possible reality that it can produce. For the past few decades history has been manipulated in the world at large and India in particular. But mixture of “fact” and “fiction” for not so innocent reasons can create havoc in a multi-religious society like ours, and that is where “appropriations” come into picture. It re-invents exclusive communal identities, provoke and nurture interminable sectarian strife. So interesting question is, at what level historical space gets exploited, at its physical and material level or at the level of its multiple interpretations?

Today’s India and Indian communalism is product of what could happen if you try to re-do history by going back to the same past/history(!) and undo it. Babri Masjid controversy spins around three very prominent issues, as opined by Romila Thapar; “faith”, “power”, and “politics”. Inevitably, we have to add ‘history’ because it is only on the space of history that these three entities can safely and powerfully play. She argues,

Each individual has a right to his or her belief and faith. But when beliefs claim the legitimacy of history, then the historian has to attempt a demarcation between the limits of belief and historical evidence. When communal forces make claims to ‘historical evidence’ for the purposes of communal politics, then the historian has to intervene.

Debate over Babri-Ram Janmbhoomi:

In the controversy on Ram Janmabhoomi, volumes have been written by scholars, journalists, and pamphleteers to prove either that there was a temple where the Babri Masjid stood since the sixteenth century or that there was no such temple. Let us look at these two l accounts one after the other.
1. **Secular Historians’ Account of Ram Janmabhoomi:**

They started with the basic questions “Is Ayodhya the birth place of Ram? Is present day Ayodhya the Ayodhya of Ramayana?” Originally, events of the story of Ram belong to the Ram-Katha which is no more available in the form of evidence to us, what we have today is our epic poem, Valmiki’s *The Ramayana*. Being a poem much of it “could have been fictional, including characters and places. Historians cannot accept the personalities, the events or the locations as historically authentic unless there is other supporting evidence from sources regarded as more reliable by historians.” In any case, very frequently “historical evidence contradicts popular beliefs”. According to Valmiki Ramayana, Ram, the King of Ayodhya, was born in the Treta Yuga that is thousands of years before the Kali Yuga which is supposed to begin in 3102 BC.  

They also excavated the controversy over the location of Ayodhya. While citing early sacred texts from other sects they claim, “Buddhist texts refer to Shravasti and Saketa, not Ayodhya, as the major cities of Koshala. Jaina texts also refer to Saketa as the capital of Koshala. Besides, as they see very few references to an Ayodhya, but this is said to be located on the Ganges, not on river Saryu which is the site of present day Ayodhya.”

While going through these references, one surely wonders what an attempt to double check mythical and fictional locations at actual geographical sites and the other way round! Lingering on the hunt for Ayodhya, they come out with a plausible story:

The town of Saketa was renamed Ayodhya by a Gupta king. Skanda Gupta in the late fifth century AD moved his residence to Saketa and called it Ayodhya. He assumed the title Vikramditya, which he used on his gold coins. Thus, what may have been the fictional Ayodhya of the epic poem was identified with Saketa quite late. This does not necessarily suggest that the Gupta king was a bhakta of Ram. In bestowing the name of Ayodhya on Saketa he was trying to gain prestige for himself by drawing on the tradition of the Suryavamsi kings, a line to which Ram is said to have belonged.
Comparing and contrasting various sources and archaeological proofs, secular group of historians believe that the cult of Ram seems to have become popular from the thirteenth century onwards. It was popularized by the on-going upswing of the Ramanandi sect and in their success lied in their use of Hindi in order to compose the Ram story\textsuperscript{17}. Finally, all the archaeological evidences and other historical sources concluded that if today’s Ayodhya was known as Saketa before the fifth century, the Ayodhya as depicted in the Ramayana by Valmiki was definitely fictional. Therefore, “the identification of Ram Janmabhoomi in Ayodhya today becomes a matter of faith, not of historical evidence.” That is why the historical uncertainty regarding the possible location-space of the Ram Janmabhoomi contrasts with the popular-massive belief in today’s Ram Janmabhoomi. It has led us decide whether we should continue praying for that faith or should we believe in archaeological evidences and stop worshipping that place and start another hunt for the “real” birth-place of Ram! They have made a very interesting observation, “it is interesting that Tulsidas, the great devotee of Ram, a contemporary of Akbar and an inhabitant of the region, is upset at the rise of the mleccha but makes no mention of the demolition of a temple at the site of Ram Janmabhoomi.”\textsuperscript{18}

The above review of historical evidence suggests that the claims made by Hindu and Muslim communal groups can find no sanction from a proof driven history. As a ‘sacred space’ the character of Ayodhya has been changing over the centuries. It has been linked to the history of many religions. Different communities have vested it with their own sacred meaning. The city cannot be claimed by any one community as its exclusive sacred preserve.

2. \textit{Hindu Nationalist Historians’ Account of Ram Janmabhoomi:}
Hindu nationalist historians have attacked on almost all the basic assumptions of the secularist intellectuals, in doing so they have criticized AIBMAC’s report on the Ayodhya. As AIBMAC has only provided a pile of papers without any coherence as contrast to the Hindu nationalist historians who claim to have a “collection of coherent testimony”. Scrutinizing the inherent discrepancy they argue that instead of proving Ram was not born in Ayodhya they “give ‘evidence’ that Ram was born in Nepal, in Punjab, in Afghanistan, in Egypt, in Varanasi, in Ayodhya on a different site, in an unknowable other place, or not at all” and each of these eight evidences have contradiction with seven other kinds of evidences in their own report. Not only this, but Hindu Nationalist historians also compare Ram Janmabhoomi with the Muslim sacred places: there is no historical substance at all in Mohammed’s claim that the Ka’aba in Mecca had been built by Abraham as a place of monotheistic worship. This story had to justify the take-over of the Ka’aba from its real owners, the “idolaters” of Arabia. And yet, in spite of the starkly ahistorical nature of the Muslim claim to the Ka’aba, this claim is not being questioned. Nobody is saying that the Muslims can only have their Ka’aba if they give historical proof that it was built by Abraham19.

Reasoning very strongly on the grounds of ‘sacred space’, they argue that the Ram Janmabhoomi site has always been a sacred site for crores of Hindus since the time immemorial, and people of this country have kept the worshipping alive even during the difficult times of Muslim regimes. Isn’t that better and sufficient evidence than a few documents here and there? Moreover, they argue that Muslims have never been asked to give evidence of their beliefs in their sacred sites, why are we, Hindus, being asked by the Government. Firmly they present their account of the history:
That the pre-existing building was a Mandir. It is coherent with all the evidence so far, and requires no special assumptions or ad hoc hypothesis. More importantly, it is positively indicated by 14 black pillars of schistose used in the Masjid. Documentary evidence from the 18th century as well as common sense dictates that, in conformity with a general pattern, these were materials of the demolished temple incorporated in the Masjid build over it. The disfigured sculptures on the black pillars all belong to Hindu religious iconography. Some of the motifs are common to different traditions, including Buddhist and Shaiva, but some are specifically Vaishanva.\textsuperscript{20}

In order to prove that the demolition of Hindu temples and their forcible replacement by mosques has been a very persistent behaviour pattern of the Muslim conquerors, this group uses the same literary, historical and archaeological tools to counter argue with the account of secular historians.
Literary Evidence:

A very long list could be given about such epics, poetry, dramas. Names of some of these are given below:

(a) Epics:- Valmiki Ramayana, Ram Upakhyan of Mahabharata (Van Parva), Yog Vasisth, Adhyatma Ramyan, Raghuvamsh etc. (b) Poetry:- Ramgeet-Govind, Geet Raghav, Ram Vilas, Ram Ashtak etc. (c) Dramas:- Pratima, Abhishek, Uttar Ramcharit, Hanumannatak, Prasanna Raghav, Rambhyudaya etc. (d) Akhyan:- Bruhat Kathamanjari, Champu Ramyan, Katha Saritsar etc. (e) Puranas:- Vishnu, Brahmand, Vayu, Koorma, Padma, Skanda, Narad etc. (f) Upanishads:- Ramottar Tapaniya, Ram Rahasya etc. (g) Other Religious Scriptures:- Jaiminiya Ashwamedh, Hanumat Vijaya, Hanumat Sanhita, Bruhat Koushal Khand etc.

Books by Muslim Writers:


The Works and Reports of foreign authors:


Archeological Evidence:

There are still such 14 pillars of touch-stone existing in the temple, which bear the load of the entire top portion of the structure and designs generally found in the Hindu temples have been carved on them. There is a Purna Kumbh with flowers, leaves and creepers on one of them. The figures of Gods-Goddesses, dancers, Dwarfal with Trishul etc. also can be seen on the pillars. These figures are similar to those of Vaishnava Temples of 11th century.
Search for Third Perspective:

All said and done. The communal violence caused by the Ram Janmabhoomi controversy in India attains its apex on 6th December 1992 by demolishing Babri Masjid followed by Bombay bombarding that killed some 900 people. When we study this entire issue, it seems that Ayodhya is not a real matter on which the above said group fought, but ‘history’ itself became a space for their attack and manipulations. Babri was demolished by a group of people who thought that by this they could rectify a historical wrong. Could they? That is the question. In fact, they added more fuel to the fire. Though all the political leaders of the temple movement always claimed to be keen followers of history, “none of them ever demanded the return of the Babri Masjid to the Hindus on grounds of history.”

India is such a large country with enormous richness of diversified cultural forms of knowledge that history becomes so fragile a space that it can be appropriated by anybody who has power (needless to say political). Let’s try to answer Nandy’s question “why did the same history not move millions of Indians for hundreds of years, not even the first generation of Hindu nationalists in the nineteenth century, not even, for that matter, the founders of the same parties that are at the forefront of the temple movement?” One of the possible reasons could be increasing Hindu Consciousness which was missing in pre-sixteenth century, as earlier Hindus were known as either Vashaiva or Shaiva for instance and not as Hindus as they identify themselves today. Secondly, the religious sects started getting more and more political identities and secularism remained just a foreign idea with all its passivity. Though role of partition and mutual hatred of communities cannot be ignored for Partition frequently becomes a historical space to re-visit in order to play blaming games.
Admittedly, the debate on the issue is not only about history and its appropriations but accounts for some pitfalls of our larger psychological and cultural spaces that frame what we as nation are today. On the one hand, we have secularist historians who keep on asking: “Was there a temple which was destroyed by the builders of the Babri Masjid?” “Is this Ayodhya really the Ayodhya of Ram?” We have a vast majority of faith driven people and fundamentalists on the other. These two parties involved in the dispute are the secular and Hindu nationalist historians; they care neither for temples nor masjids, except for archaeological, aesthetic, or political reasons. Now the problem is, there is no dialogue per se between these two groups, we need to have a common platform and a common thinking language, provided the political parties wish the same and allow such harmonious event to happen!

In modern India, to the extent it has got involved in the controversy over the masjid at Ayodhya, history, not Ayodhya, is the terrain for which the “secularists” and the Hindu nationalists fight for. Because ultimately, they think that emerging India would surely try to rationalise/historicize their problems, especially Babri controversy. Both want to get hold of and correct collective history with limited fragmented tools. Nandy compares the goals of these parties when he says, “the former want to correct the intolerance that, they feel, characterizes all faiths; the latter want to correct the intolerant faiths and teach their followers a lesson.”25 Here, Ashish Nandy attacks on both parties and the way they try to solve this problem.

We need to understand political positions of these historians such as Romila Thapar, S. Gopal, Bipan Chandra and Harbans Mukhia who are constantly arguing on behalf of their respective patrons, the secular historians, especially when they wrote that there was no historical evidence of the exact location of Ram’s birth in the present city of Ayodhya. Quite contrary, one of their
major challengers, the historian S. P. Gupta, has counter-argued it all on behalf of the Hindu nationalists when he claimed his presence in the archaeological expedition to Ayodhya led by B. B. Lal when actually he was not. Hypothetically, Thapar and Gupta share the belief that the current clash in Ayodhya is more about “historical truths and the rectification of historical wrongs which can only be solved by objective, scientific history”. Secular historians assume apparent blessings of secularism when they think that India’s past has been bloody and fanatic and from the very beginning the Hindus and the Muslims have been at war with each other. They believe that the secular faiths organized around the ideas of nation-state, scientific rationality, and development are more tolerant and should correct that history, “Despite the more than 110 million persons killed in man-made violence in the last century, the killing in most cases justified by secular faiths, including Baconian science and Darwinism in the case of colonialism, biology in the case of Nazism, and science and history in the case of communism.”

The so-called “liberal”, “modernist” and “secularist” believe and try to make people believe that not merely the present but even the past and the future of some cultures (like that of Indian) have to be reworked. When we examine the main tools and agencies in that utopian project of “redefinition”, they are “devaluation, marginalization, and liquidation of memories” that cannot be historicized (with ample rationality and the rhetoric that is needed). However, they seem to suffer from ideological and horological errors otherwise how they would forget as Nandy aptly puts it, that in India plural visions of the future derive from plural visions of the past! Thus, unqualified historicization on the past of so-called rebellious intellectuals has unnecessarily opened up new fatal possibilities of violence to eliminate plurality and destroy the very fabric of
Lajja probes into some of the most basic interrogatives pertaining to how the idea of ‘religious minority’ becomes so significant within the historically charged communal space and the other way round. The beginning of the novel renders the list of historical events starting from 1947 to 1992 which serves the basis of the narrative that follows. Sudhamoy is the character who has witnessed changes during various phases of historical space and that is why his paralyzed situation is the symbol of Bangladesh which has witnessed history in its worst colour. Sudhamoy asks:

The management of this country’s affairs since 1975 had been gradually taken over by fundamentalist elements. The people were aware of this, but nobody seemed to want to react. Did this generation have no sense of values? Where is the spirit which had propelled the youth in 1952 to stage mass protests to make Bengali the language of the nation? Where were the three million patriots of 1971? Why was communalism being cordially ushered into a secular country (123).

From the very partition of India, he traces ‘historical space’ and sees how the entire country has been going to the path of doom due to communalism. The very space of the novel, the line of argument, presumes political will as the controlling space over ‘historical space’ leading to the formation of Bangladesh wherein Hindu minority is destined to suffer, “The British had understood all too well, that if they wanted to perpetuate their presence in the subcontinent, it would be necessary to further enflame the existing feelings of ill-will between Hindus and Muslims. It was from this shrewd perception that the policy of divide and rule was born” (180).

Hence, the argument is the present condition of communal tension and violence between Hindu-Muslim in India and in Bangladesh has a common root to be sourced to. Some political decisions taken in the remote past are actually taking lives of the minority in both the countries. Often,
history is excavated by all sorts of people to find out material that they can use to nurture communal violence. Can there be more severe manipulation of history than this? Taslima Nasreen seems to argue that why, then, now the politicians in Bangladesh want to repeat the history of ‘divide and rule’? Why do they turn blind eye to the pathetic consequences that it is bearing? Lajja is quoting acts and amendments from the constitution of Bangladesh historically in order to show how they made people’s lives miserable.

Not only that, she points out to the political formations of religious organizations and political organizations based on a religious inclination which have problematized the issue of Babri Masjid and Hindu-Muslim conflict. Lajja records, “In 1906, it was, thanks to the British, that, Muslim league had been founded on communal principles. It was this party that was responsible for vitiating the social and political atmosphere with the poison of communalism. But then the Congress could not escape blame either” (87).

It reveals two dimensions of historical and colonial space: history itself is a big problem and the way it is interpreted is a bigger problem. This view condemns and considers Muslim league and Congress party responsible for the communal violence. ‘Historical space’ is part and parcel of writer’s imagination throughout the novel and she makes frequent backwards to this space in order to make coherent sense of communal violence after the demolition of Babri Masjid. There are questions asked in the novel regarding the Ram being an epic character or God, whether there was any Ram Janmbhoomi at the place of Babri Masjid?

Focusing on Hindu-Muslim communal tension during the time of Babri controversy, Riot takes on a journey through various historical landmarks, personalities and intra-national political issues. The novel is based on the actual incident of a riot in Khargone, Madhya Pradesh. The
fictional account of the riot on the conflicts of Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Masjid indicates the dialectics between history and fiction. Tharoor uses multiple modes of narration i.e. newspaper reports, extracts from dairy and journals, letters etc. in order to give a holistic account of the historical event.27

This narrative technique helps him take multiple stands on one hand and no stand on the other. As he tries to represent what fundamentalists believe about each other’s communities and how intellectuals and secularist comment upon the event of Babri controversy. For example, there is a character called Ram Charan Gupta who tells to Randy Diggs, an American journalist who has come to India in order to cover the death story of a young American social worker Priscilla Hart:

But these Muslims are evil people, Mr. Diggs. You have to understand their mentality. They are more loyal to a foreign religion, Islam, than to India. They are all converts from the Hindu faith of their ancestors, but they refuse to acknowledge this, pretending instead that they are all descended from conquerors from Arabia or Persia or Samarkand. Fine-if that is so; let them go back to those places! Why do they stay here if they will not assimilate into our country? They stay together, work together, pray together. It is what you Americans, I know, call a ghetto mentality. (54-55).

These kinds of shallow logic were so prevalent during that time that it was very difficult to get rid of them. The bitterness of religious fanatics is shown as we see in the world around us in our day-to-day life. Due to political provocations and false propagandas during Babri controversy, people have started believing in the dictations of all the major religious groups and parties. For example, Ram Charan Gupta believes:

Anyway, this is what she (Rithambhara) says: Muslims are like a lemon squirted into the cream of India. They turn it sour. We have to remove the lemon, cut it up into little pieces, squeeze out the pips and throw them away. That is what we have to do, Mr. Diggs. That is what the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal, the Shiv Sena, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and all the associated organizations of political family, the Sangh Parivar, will do one day. And the whole world should be grateful, because Muslims are evil people, I tell you (57).

On the other hand, we also have views of Muslim intellectuals who have also contributed to the debate on the issue of disputed land and the ‘historical space’. As the character of Mohammed
Sarwar who is professor of history at Delhi University gives a much elaborated account of historical facts about Babri Masjid:

Your Hindu types are presuming to know the exact place of birth of a man whose birthplace is historically unverifiable. I know there are people who’ll say, ignore these pettifogging historians, how does it matter…The Rama cult, and its offshoot the Bhakti movement, rose during the period of the Muslim conquest of North India and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, when Hinduism was on the defensive. Here, we see historical space merging with the ‘sacred space’. These views are very significant because they talk about how India as a country lives with so many discrepancies from the viewpoint of a Muslim scholar. During the discussion with Priscilla, Lakshman, a bureaucrat defines “communalism” as “the sense of religious chauvinism that transforms itself into bigotry, and sometimes violence, against the followers of other faiths” (44). Interestingly, the character of Lakshman is presented as an educated Indian who has secularist bent of mind on one hand but also as an intellectual who justifies some popular Hindu ways as Indian ways:

To be Indian is to be a part of an elusive dream we all share, a dream that fills our minds with sounds, words, flavours from many sources that we cannot easily identify. Muslim invaders may indeed have destroyed Hindu temples, putting mosques in theirs place, but this did not- could not-destroy the Indian dream. Nor did Hinduism suffer a fatal blow. Large, eclectic, agglomerative, the Hinduism that I know understands that faith is matter of hearts and minds, not of bricks and stone. “Build Ram in your heart”, the Hindu is enjoyed; and if Ram is in your heart, it will matter little where else he is, or is not (145).

Therefore, Ram is excluded from ‘historical space’ and bestowed in the ‘sacred space’ which elevates ‘sacred space’ over historical space; for secularists it is the belief in historical space that would bring communal peace whereas people like Lakshman believe that it is a notion in the ‘belief’ that would solve the problem caused by historical space. However, the latter presumes that the communal problem and violence is caused by Hindu’s demand for the replacement of Mosque with Temple. After taking such a parallel fundamentalist and secular stands, Riot comments upon the status of (secular) history and historians in India during the time of
communal conflicts. However, it also has the same secular colour of thought as an undercurrent philosophy. This can be considered as an intellectual’s views on the Babri controversy which has, though, almost no say in the broader political turmoil of power:

I am not amongst the Indian secularists who oppose agitation because they reject the historical basis of the claim that the mosque stood on the site of Ram’s birth. They may be right, they may be wrong, but to me what matters is what most people believe, for their beliefs offer a sounder basis for public policy than the historians; footnotes. And it would work better. Instead of saying to impassioned Hindus, “you are wrong, there is no proof this was Ram’s birth place, there is no proof that the temple Babar demolished to build this mosque was a temple to ram, go away leave the mosque in place” how much more effective might it have been to say, “you may right, let us assume for a moment there was a Ram Jannabhoomi temple here that was destroyed to make room for this make four hundred and sixty year ago, does that mean we should behave in that way today? If the Muslims of 1520s acted out of ignorance and fanaticism, should Hindus act in the same in 1980s? by doing what you propose to do you will hurt the feelings of Muslims of today, who did not perpetrate the injustices of the past and who are in no position to inflict justice upon you today; you will provoke violence and rage against your own kind; you will tarnish the name of the Hindu people across the world. You will irreparably damage your own cause. Is this worth it (145)?

The chronotopos of Partition is also brought to the discussion because the character of communal violence after 1970 has its roots in partition and preparation for it. Many times Muslims in India are accused of dividing India, but looking at the historical space which also shares its role with political space, we come to know that Muslims could not have been responsible. As professor Sarvar argues, “Muslims didn’t partition the country-the British did, the Muslim League did, the congress party did. There are more Muslims in India today than in Pakistan. This is where we belong” (111). There are fractions of history that people know and live. Such attitude towards Muslims is in itself a kind of violence; subtle, ethical and psychological.

Thus Riot, to use Shashi Tharoor’s words, is a novel about the ownership of history, about love, hate, cultural collision religious, fanaticism and impossibility of knowing the truth about what happened to history of Babri. There are many examples in the novel that actually resemble actual history and debate leaving us wondering whether it is fiction or history!
Partitions is perhaps one of the best examples of how fiction takes revenge on history’s misreading and serves as a supplementary to correct our understanding of the past. It is a novel with world history in general and India’s history in particular. The setting of the novel is an imagery court of an author-Adib wherein all the personalities from diverse histories are called for their testimony of the history which might have caused violence of one or the other kind. Naturally, Babar is called from his grave to justify and clear his stand in the actual history of Babri Masjid. Since everybody accuses him sole responsible of the current communal-sectarian strife today. Highly frustrated Babar argues that “as Gandhiji did not build Gandhinagar, Jawaharlal Nehru did not build so many Jawaharnagars in India I did not build Babri Masjid”. A character counter-argues Babar, “but you yourself are the root cause of all our disputes! Had you not destroyed the Ram Mandir, this dispute would not have arisen at all”. Now let us see his account of the history and question fictional account of historiography on one hand, believe in historical validity of fictional narrative for a while on the other. One can always verify these views with the historical evidences available. Babar argues:

Let my Allah and history stand witness in Hindustan, I neither destroyed a mandir nor had a masjid built in my name. Islam had come to Hindustan much before my arrival. Wasn’t Ibrahim Lodi a Muslim when he sat on the throne of Agra?...I had come to conquer Hindustan for myself, not in the name of Islam. When I was alive I never heard of Tulsidas, the creator of Ram, the Hindu god. During my reign, not such god existed. So how could I have demolished his temple?...At that time, Krishna had been accepted as an incarnation of the gods. His birthplace was Mathura, just fifty miles from Agra. If I were to bent on destruction, wouldn’t I have ground to dust Krishna’s birthplace? Why would I have gone to Ayodhya to demolish Ram’s birthplace? Ram became a god only after Tulsidas, who was a child during my lifetime, wrote the Ramayana. And that was after my death (57-58).

Again, this oral testimony of Babar can be questioned on grounds of reality i.e. Babar never gave such an analytic account, however we have reasons to believe that comparative historiography does support (fictional) Babar’s (real ) argument! During the whole discussion on whether Babar built Babri Masjid, Babar requests jury to call Fuhrer, a British bureaucrat-historian from
colonial time to verify his testimony. It is worth noticing here that Fuhrer is one of the most important figures who messed up communal harmony in India after 1857. He is the man who destroyed the monument which said that Babri Masjid was actually founded by Ibrahim Lodi and not by Babar. As he confesses:

I said that in the Hijri year 930, that is, near about 17 September 1523, Ibrahim Lodi had laid the foundation of this mosque. The building was completed on 10 September 1524 and was named after the Babri Masjid. This monument has not been destroyed by time, but rather, by people eager to perpetuate and keep alive the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi conflict.…no one blamed Ibrahim Lodi because firstly, no mandir existed there. Secondly, Lodi’s paternal grandmother was a Hindu…in his veins flowed Hindu blood. So obviously, he could not be blamed…as part of our (British) policies of 1857, we had decided that in order to keep the British government from collapsing, it was necessary to create rift between Hindus and Muslim who had been united in 1857. It was what motivated me to deface Ibrahim Lodi’s inscription on the Babri Masjid. The translation of this still lies in the files of the Archaeological Survey of India. No one has thought to destroy it. However, the two crucial pages of the Baburnama28 (Baburnama does not have the record of the five and a half months between 3 April 1528 and 17 September 1528. The English gazetteer H.R. Neville writes that in the summer of 1528, Babar was in Ayodhya. Mrs. Beveridge, who was the first to translate Baburnama, gives the text and the translation of these above verses in an appendix to the memoirs. The crucial passage reads as follows: ‘By the command of the Emperor Babar, whose justice is an edifice reaching up to the very height of the heavens, the good hearted Mir Baqi built the alighting place of angels. Bawad [Buwad] khair baqi (may this goodness last forever)’. (Baburnama, translated by A.F. Beveridge, 1922, II, pp. LXXVII). However this missing history can be found in Humayunama which was written by Gulbadan Bagum, Babar’s daughter, which says during these three months Babar was in Sirhind because the imam of Lahore had rebelled against him.) which prove that king had gone Avadh and not Ayodhya, mysteriously disappeared. Having played this dirty trick, the British and, particularly, H.R. Neville, the Faizabad gazetteer, went a step further. The latter placed on record the falsehood that Babar had stayed in Ayodhya for a week and ordered the demolition of the Ram Mandir (63-64).

This highlights one of the very popular notions of how Britishers played a dirty role in giving birth to hatred between two communities, as we discussed in Tamas. However, it also leans towards secularist views of how enemy is always “other” and located in an unidentified historical past. This normalising process of secular history has its own merit for those who wish to solve this problem in certain manner.

Partitions offers some of the gruesome facts about the colonial space because now there is consensus among the historians that though Mughals unintentionally started communalism, the
British systematized it and employed all the strategies to divide Hindus and Muslims. For instance, when Babar is accused of destroying the Ram Mandir, he refuses the charge by arguing that the politics was played in the colonial era which is supported by Fuhrer:

‘Babar is right. As part of our changing policies, we had decided that in order to keep the British government from collapsing, it was necessary to create rifts between Hindus and Muslims who had been united in 1857...H. R. Neville, placed on record in the Faizabad gazetteer the falsehood that Babar had stayed in Ayodhya for a week and ordered the demolition of the Ram Mandir (61).

It would not be stretching too far if we say that the communal violence that took place before and after Babri demolition, has its roots in the nineteenth century. Especially when after independence, we got vicious intentions of the British, we could have stopped it. Looking at the historical development of communal violence, partition is the second major period after colonial one in colouring the character of communalism afresh. The novel tells us interesting facts about the history of partition, “Jinnah Sahib did not create history, history created him. Learn from history. Don’t set the cauldron of religion over the flames of history. If you do, be prepared to witness a repeat of what happened during the partition of India” (95). The conspiracy of colonial space gives us reason to believe that communal problem in India will take more time to be solved. Novel calls Bhagat Singh who claims, “Driven by your colonial imperialism you sought to exact revenge for the unity that was demonstrated by the country in 1857” (288).

Thus, the fictional narratives also offer a unique kind of access to the history and that is why fiction is gaining more and more attractions of anthropological inquires on issues like communal tension in India today. Now, we do have Supreme Court’s judgement on the disputed land, but the question is how does one divide living histories among communities and communal mind-sets? What has happened to Babari Masjid and communal feelings and riots afterword? Histories have played a vital role in producing hatred. History that we teach through textbook is different
from the academic’s history, history presented by media is different from history of our scriptures and history transmitted by politicians is different than history people live with. We are sure we cannot escape from history; the question then is, how to manipulate it for constructive reasons? To quote from the novel, “Authentic history is that which is engraved on hearts and minds and erased the moment it is put in writing, lest it be read by those whom it is not intended. The worth of those erased words is appreciated solely by scholars who understand the language of Socrates, Gautam Buddha, Christ and Gandhi” (264).

**4.4 Heterotopia and Communal Violence:**

Foucault’s notion of heterotopia deconstructs the way we understand duality of reality and unreality of space; it manifests those undercurrents of conflicts of spaces that hitherto remained latent. We would attempt to take a close look at how ‘heterotopia’ becomes such a location wherein communalism emerges and flourishes. It not only decodes the patterns of communal violence but also renders a taxonomic account of the genealogies of communal spaces. Interpreting post 1970s novels from a heterotopic perspective is to study how exactly novels enter into the dichotomy of literary space and communal space, of real and imagined spaces, of authentic representation and fictional spaces etc.

*Tamas* is a story of communalism in practice and that why perhaps the way it deals with ‘heterotopia’ is very different from the way other texts deal with it. It shows us an impossibility of separating religion-caste-class structures of Indian society which always renders conducive atmosphere for communal violence. Here, the roots of communalism account for ‘heterotopias of deviation’ which are, according to Foucault, institutions where we place individuals whose
behaviour is outside the norm (e.g. hospitals, asylums, prisons, rest homes, cemetery etc.). In other words, they are spaces wherein people behave strangely and violently.

In the communal context of *Tamas*, we can say that here heterotopia of deviation is psychologically and politically coloured both at the individual level and collective level. Here ‘deviation’ is by choice unlike in what Foucault says wherein people go crazy and they are sent to heterotopia of deviation in order to control them. In other words, people are good in so far as they feel they are safe and economically doing well but they deviate to violence in the opposite situations. In *Tamas*, individuals who could live peacefully for decades become so violent within the ‘heterotopia of deviation’ that entire town turns out to be a corpse. Deviations of individuals are driven by a set of motivations, which are consistent motivations in most of the communal riots: economic, political, safety, revenge, historical, religious etc. For instance, the way Nathu gets involved in the killing of a pig is quiet unlike of him but he chooses deviation to the communal which leads to enormous violence but as soon as he realises it, he steps back.

Extremely disturbing and unexpected behaviour in entire *Tamas* is that of Shah Nawaz who kills Milkhi; in the entire episode, as we have discussed in the ‘sacred space’, we see he is motivated by some of the psycho-communal stimuli. Though Shah Nawaz is secular, he deviates from secular space to communal space and becomes a murderer; and then again he returns to his secular space, his normal space (see the diagram below). This can also be seen as the static and dynamic chronotopos. Like there are characters that choose to be in their respective normal space especially when they are expected to deviate, they don’t deviate like other characters mentioned before but still they are responsible for the consequence of violence. In such cases, active
deviation is expected from the people having power to influence the dynamism of communal violence in two ways: they can stop it and make it worse.

As the character of Richard who understands the urgency of his action (deviation) as the authority but he does not deviate to stop communal violence as he escapes smartly. It is ultimately the choice of space at appropriate time. The incident of Harmansingh and his wife shows that they choose to deviate at right time and could save their lives. Here, there are two aspects of dynamic forces; the attackers are also in motion and Hermansingh and his wife too, it is because of the time-chronos which governs the space-topos. In another example, the character of Itrafarosh (the scent seller) is murdered because he was at wrong place at wrong time, he could not have deviated from his static space during the riot had economic motivation not been at work.

The conflict between Sikhs and Muslims in the novel is example of how simultaneous creation of real and imagined spaces can bring about violence. The rumors on both sides nourish
imagined space-heterotopia of illusion to such an extent that it becomes the real space and motivates members of both the groups to kill or be killed. During such a tumult, the role of historical and narrative memory play an important role; stories of the past are constantly retrieved to instigate violent instinct. The words like ‘sacrifice’, ‘revenge’, ‘our blood’, ‘bravery’ are repeatedly used to excite the choice of deviation.

*Tamas* ends with a very suffocating description of data collection of lost people and their properties. One wonders if there is any meaning when human emotions fight and fail to get translated as figures of statistics! Peace-committees are the best examples of post-violence static stage of the same people who participated actively in riots. These and many more instances can be seen in order to understand heterotopic analysis of the communal violence represented in *Tamas.*

Written at the backdrop of demolition of Babari Mosque on December 6, 1992, *Lajja* records the repercussions of the event in Bangladesh. At the very outset, it is stated in the novel that the act of destruction of the sixteenth century edifice is an attack on ‘international harmony and collective conscious of the people’. What effects of an event in India can have in other parts of the world, especially the neighboring countries which were not separate before the recent past? Babri Mosque happened to be an architectural/physical space *in* India, how on earth people of other countries got to do with that, to such an extent of massive violence? Well, the answers to these doubts are found in ‘heterotopia’. People, irrespective of their territorial concerns and relations, get affected. For instance, the narrative reasons:

Needless to say, in Bangladesh too, the reaction to this event is bound to create frantic waves of religious hysteria. Temples will be smashed and leveled to the ground, Hindu homes will be burnt and their shops will be looted. At the instigation of the BJP, kar sevaks broke down the Babri Masjid only to strengthen the Muslim clerics of Bangladesh. Did BJP, VHP and their
associates, harbour the notion that their insane actions in Ayodhya would cause a reaction only within the geographical boundaries of India? In India the entire ordeal has already given birth to widespread communal riots. Five hundred people have died. Six hundred, may be even a thousand. The number death increases by the hour. Did the devout Hindus, who were intending to look after the interest of almost twenty five million Hindus living in Bangladesh too? Not only in Bangladesh, in almost every country in West Asia, there is a fair scattering Hindus. Did the Hindu fanatics ever consider what severe adversities they might have to face? As a political party, the BJP should have been responsible enough to realize that India cannot be isolated from the rest of the world. If a malignant situation has taken form in India, the pain caused by it will be felt all over the world and most certainly by her immediate neighbours (3).

The Hindus in Bangladesh have suffered all that is anticipated in the aforementioned passage. Interestingly, the concept of heterotopia is so visible here that the space of Babri becomes too significant that people are harassed and killed. People share the spaces across the territories due to heterotopic conditions of collective consciousness. The members of any community have no choice of not belonging to the heterotopia; as long as they belong to their respective religious community, automatically they share the heterotopia and all those dimensions that come with one’s heterotopia. Though Hindus have hegemonic control over their communal space i.e. they can destroy an architectural edifice within their communal space and Muslims in and outside India get disturbed by the act. For, they feel their heterotopia penetrated on communal ground, Muslims having hegemonic control in any country wherein Hindus are in minority, would certainly make all the possible attempts to compensate/avenge their heterotopic loss/damage.

The problematic of heterotopia of communal violence is not as simple as it appears to be. The two communities could share the same heterotopia on racial, linguistic, geographical, historical and cultural grounds but on religious ground their heterotopias are likely to differ. For example, both Sudhamoy and Suranjan do not want to leave Bangladesh in spite of having visible omens of their death. Suranjan argues, ‘was it necessary for his family to run away like fugitives just because of their names?...why was he seemingly deprived of his rights, and why was his
motherland turning her back on him? Why could he not say her, I am son of this soil, please see that no harm comes to me (1)!

The sense of ethnicity percolates into the duality of heterotopia; on one hand there is real space which is disturbed by the demolition of Babri Masjid - a space geographically far away-an unreal space, there is a lived space in Bangladesh - a real space of life on the other. There is no reason why the space of Hindus-real space is attacked because of Hindus somewhere in an unreal space. What connects the two is the heterotopias that builds and blurs the boundaries of the real and unreal spaces of human geographies. So, Suranjan and Sudhamoy’s obsession with the geographical space is responsible for the suffering family goes through. In fact, Suranjan’s sister has an alternative solution which would translate the heterotopia of crisis into the heterotopia of peace i.e. conversion.

Life and times of Sudhamoy and Suranjan are split between the spaces which are either in the past or in present and both at the same time. For instance, the narrative tells us,

He thought about what Belal had been repeating over and over again. Something like ‘why did you break our Babri Masjid.’ Suranjan wondered why the Babri Masjid should be Bella’s. After all, it was in India and the property of Indians. And could anyone say that Suranjan had broken the mosque? He had never even been to India. Was Belal looking at the Hindus in India and those in Bangladesh in the same light? Just because Hindus have brought down mosque, did it necessarily follow that Suranjan had destroyed it? Was Suranjan to be identified with the Hindu fundamentalists in Ayodhya? Did religion supersede nation and nationality (176)?

Suranjan’s inability to understand Belal’s complaint is a result of Belal’s heterotopia; his sense of belonging to the religious faith irrespective of national/geographical boundaries, his mistake of accusing Suranjan as an active Hindu fundamentalist who had destroyed the Babri masjid despite that fact that it is not true. Secularly thinking, Hindus in Bangladesh should not be personally responsible for demolition of Babri masjid, however the reality is they do suffer the
consequences of what Hindus have done in India in the same manner as Muslims suffer in India. Ironically, the victimizers and victims from both the countries have not chosen their religion and all that comes with it, they are simply facing the consequence of heterotopic claims and accusations. It is in this regard that heterotopic space raises another issue of nationality and citizenship. For instance, *Lajja* argues:

Why did Sheikh Hasina have to think about the safety of the Muslims in India? As citizens of this country didn’t the Hindus of Bangladesh have the right to expect an atmosphere of communal harmony? Why was it necessary to show more sympathy towards the lives and properties of the Muslims of India, rather than towards one’s own citizens? Should it then be taken for granted that the Awami league was feeding the public the same stuff as the Jamaatis-in other words, anti-Indian and pro-Islam (177)?

Such trans-territorial commitments are bound to come into the picture during the ‘crisis heterotopia’ of communal violence because it becomes imperative for the politicians to cater to the “friends-far-away” so that the “enemy-inside” can be taken to the task. While doing so, it creates an illusion of space which ultimately governs the real space. If a nation essentially considers people of different religions differently by privileging the majority over minority, victims of minority get connected (in some sense) with the majority of the other country and similarly victimizers of Bangladesh empathizes with Muslim-victims of India. Such a communal problematic occurs because the people belong to the dual spaces: they are “here” and “there” also, in crisis minority is more inclined to be “there” and majority “here”. We can term it as ‘fluid heterotopia’ which is common attitude of people to be within a space which assures their safety on one hand and punishes the members of other religious community on the other.

Written on the Babri-Ram Janmabhoomi question, *Riot* indulges into the heterotopia of time directly. In our discussion we saw how this issue of ownership of the site has been historically recurring in Indian socio-political scenario. The holocaust of partition has added more fuel to the
fire. For instance, Muslim loyalty is always under scrutiny and they are always suspected of being more committed to Pakistan than India. Professor Mohammed Sarwar represents heterotopia of time when he argues:

M J Akbar famously denounced Jinnah as having “sold the birthright of the Indian Muslims for a bowl of soup.” Some of us feel that our birthright cannot be so easily sold, but it is precisely that sense of loss that drives so many of us to rage and sorrow-the feeling that, since the country was divided in our name, we are somehow less entitled to our due in what remains of. “If you don’t like it here why don’t you go to Pakistan?” say the crassest of the Hindu bigots, how can you reply, “Because this is my home, I am as entitled to it as you are.” When Jinnah and his followers have given the Hindu bigots their best excuse? When they surrender a portion of our entitlement by saying that the homeland of an Indian Muslim is really a foreign country called Pakistan (201)?

There are two communal aspects of heterotopia we would like to interrogate here: 1) the communal insistence on Indian Muslim to go to Pakistan and 2) Indian Muslims’ sense of belonging. Wherever there is any communal tension in India, the popular notion about punishing Indian Muslim is to call them “Pakistani”. There are inflammatory slogans shouted wherein they asked to leave India and go to Pakistan as we have seen in Lajja; Bangladeshi Hindus are asked to go to India. So, for fundamentalist Hindus in India, Muslims belong to Pakistan despite the fact that they are Indian citizen, they do want to go, and their ancestors were born and buried in Indian soil so they are as much part of India as any Indian. In addition to that, Indian Muslims of today cannot be held responsible for some Muslims during partition, a remote past. Thus, Indian Muslims belong in two countries; in India by all means and in Pakistan because some communal elements consider them to. The demands of Hindu fanatics that Muslims should go to Pakistan has its “justification” in the past, and the reasons of Indian Muslims of not going there lie in present. That is what we call split space of communal existence and violence. Secondly, the way Indian Muslims think about India sufficiently proves their sense of belonging to this country’s
space. For Professor Mohammed Sarwar says, “I love this country because India shaped me, my
mind, my tastes, my friendships, my passions” (112).

Heterotopia of time is essentially making the dialogue between the historical wrongs and present
day “rights”. Can one undo a space created centuries ago, by applying standards which are not
applicable at all today? For instance, the argument that Ram Charan Gupta renders to Randy is
worth noting:

Hindu temples were destroyed and replaced by mosques quite deliberately, as part of a
conscious imperial strategy by the Muslim rulers to demoralize the local population and
humiliate them. It was a way of saying, your Hindu gods are not so powerful, they had to bow
before Muslim might, just as you too must subjugate yourselves to your Mughal masters. That
was the message of the Gyan Vapi mosque, and that was the message of the so-called Babri
Masjid. Now tell me, Mr. Diggs, is that a message that has any place in today’s free and
independent India? Is it not time to restore the pride of the local people in their own traditions,
their own worth, by rebuilding the Ram Janmabhoomi temple (123)?

Again there are parallel spaces people live in and want others to live in. What we see here is the
problem of interpretation of space; Hindus have interpreted it as a kind of “message” Muslim
rulers wanted them to remember whereas it could have easily been just an extension of territories
of one’s kingdom by the mark of Mosques. Or let’s imagine that the previous interpretation is
correct, even then one cannot superimpose ‘an undo’ on that temporarily remote space. Within
the fabrics of chronotopos, communalists are trying to rejuvenate static heterotopia of the past by
creating dynamic heterotopia of the present. Riot puts it nicely:

If Muslims of the 1520s acted out of ignorance and fanaticism, should Hindus act the same way
in the 1980s? By doing what you propose to do, you will hurt the feelings of the Muslims today,
who did not perpetrate the injustice of the past and who are in no position to inflict injustice
upon you today; you will provoke violence and rage against your own kind; you will tarnish the
name of the Hindu people across the world; and you will irreparably damage your own cause. Is
this worth (146)?

Due to inability to understand heterotopia of time, we know what happened: riots erupted in
many cities of India, more than 2,000 people died, both in Pakistan and in Bangladesh many
Hindu temples were destroyed and Hindus were killed. 1993 Bombay Blasts took away lives of many. Godhra riot in 2002 is an addition to a series of consequences caused by Ram Janmabhoomi issue.

As against that, it is quite surprising that how all of a sudden Ayodhya became centre of Hinduism even for those who have been disciples of Shiva before. It is this fluid ‘sacred space’ that heterotopia studies in order to decode violence. The political use of media and language played crucial part in establishing “new ‘sacred space’”-heterotopia in the collective unconscious. Communal violence takes place because of creation of heterotopia, an illusion of reality or substitution of one reality with other. The riots occurred during and after Babri Masjid revealed one of the surprising elements of communal violence after 1970: riots have been engineered so one cannot really say ‘all of a sudden’ riots erupted. That is because, now rioters study ‘space’, ‘time’ and create heterotopia to be used for any act of communal violence. The procession for Ram Janmabhoomi, the preparation for that actually created conducive chronotopos-heterotopia in which violence can be executed.

*Partitions* can be simply called the novel of heterotopia; containing heterotopias of all kinds. What else can be more suitable examples of heterotopia than Babar’s supposed attacked on Ram Mandir, Partition and Demolition of Babri Masjid? The very title “*Partitions*” questions creations of new heterotopia of hatred across the cultures. Largely, it dwells upon the space of partition. When a character is persuaded to go to Pakistan, he argues, “You have told me to go away. Even if I manage to scrape together the money for the fare, how do I take my fields on Pakistan (46)? For him, going to Pakistan is going with his entire being; with everything that makes him what he really is. It is certainly not possible to carry along fields to Pakistan but it
shows how painful was it for people to relocate themselves in the new space. This argument lingers in one more such discussion wherein a character compares the space of God with his own, “Gangauli is my home town; Mecca is not my city. This is my home and the Kaaba is Allah’s. If God - glory be to Him - loves His abode, wont He understand that we too cherish our homes…can Lahore ever become Kaaba (49)? The heterotopia that pro-Pakistani wanted to create became difficult because people posed real life problems of shifting the space.

Not only this, ‘sacred space’ which is assumed to be have caused Pakistan but the novel tells us that it is rather completely opposite, “Islam does not accept boundaries. It negates nationalism (101). If that is taken to be true, people who stood for the creation of Pakistan, actually produced a false heterotopia in which people are called to live in the name of religion. Can such heterotopia create the same life as people used to live before the shift? Communal violence occurred during partition because some people tried to put Islam in the boundary called Pakistan; unfortunately many believed in it. Therefore, the false heterotopia has potential to make difference in the lives of people to such an extent that they can kill and get killed. The echo of this false heterotopia can be seen to be taking shape in the hearts of people. Here is an interesting dialogue:

What were you doing there?
I was creating Khalistan.
Why?
Because I was creating Pakistan within Pakistan.
Wasn’t Pakistan created in 1947?
It was, but that’s a matter of geography. The Contours of Pakistan we carry in our hearts and heads have yet to take concrete shape (54).

Here, we can see that there is a dialogue between the actual space of Pakistan and the feeling which created that space. The idea that created Pakistan, in fact, created such a heterotopia of multitude that keep on proliferating creations of Pakistan both inward and outward. That is why
the character is referring to “creating Pakistan within Pakistan”. Heterotopia of multiplicity lies in the hearts and minds of the people and actualization of newer spaces based on hatred then becomes just a matter of execution. The current debate and demands of separate India states typify heterotopia of multiplicity; if one state is possible on whatsoever reasons, there are as many states possible as one can possibly think on the same reasons. In the process, violence is likely to happen for the very idea of plucking portions from the total space is an act of violence.

What if the religion is identified as a country, to the extent that it becomes sole hallmark of the national and individual identities? *Partitions* goes against this idea and explains:

Pakistan was created in the name of Islam. This was a phenomenon without precedent. Religious identities had always emerged from within a nation. Despite the arrival of the Prophet of Islam Hazrat Mohammed and the descent of the sacred Koran from heavens, Arabs remained Arabs, Iraq was distinctively Iraq, Egypt retained its unique identity, but Pakistan did not remain Bharat or Hindustan (113)!

The space of religion cannot be bound within the territory of a country or one cannot say that people belonging to a geographical territory will follow one particular faith; something that happened with Pakistan and Bangladesh. The cultural space of the geography defines the identity of the people of a given country. So, people in Pakistan remain Pakistani as long as they follow Islam, the moment they disown their allies, they cease to be Pakistani! Hence, people have to accept the heterotopia of a religion so that they can belong to the country. The problem occurs when a country starts considering a religion its property. The creation of Pakistan also created problems for Muslims in India. For, Indians would believe that Pakistan is the country for Muslims so why don’t Muslims in India go to Pakistan?

The Babri-Ram Janmabhoomi controversy got inflamed by this identical spaces; religious and national. Hindu nationalists could not tolerate a Muslim monument (and because it is a Muslim,
it is related to Pakistan which is an enemy!) over (a supposed) Ram Janmabhoomi which triggered violence at massive level. Heterotopia which is created by religious notions affects life space of people.

4.5 ‘Political Space’ and Communal Violence:
We have considered political spaces as very essential domains of power-mechanisms: trying to control, manipulate and exploit various spheres of life and society in chapter 3. The history of communal violence tells us that political space has been *a priori* in which communal violence emerged and developed. We would like to see now how post 1970 Indian novels represent these political spaces in terms of their role in engineering and executing communal violence both explicitly and implicitly. Our discussion on the nature of relationship between political space and communal violence would deal with problems of ideology, democracy, secularism, religious organizations, power-play etc.

*Tamas* is widely known as a literary expression of political background of communal violence. The novel begins with a judgmental error on the part of the narrative; the exposition of novel tells us that Murad Ali makes Nathu kill a pig and then next day we find someone has thrown it on the steps of mosque. This incident, as it seems, indicates a political stand of the writer who shows that seeds of riots may be shown by the British but Muslims like Murad Ali have executed it with the help of low caste Hindu like Nathu.

The novel tries to answer to a question which has been asked a number of times but hardly answered satisfactorily; *how did British saw the seeds of communalism in India?* While listening to Richard, a British official, we come to know the smart ways in which the British did play the dirty politics. For example, during the conversation with his wife, he says, “rulers have their eyes
on differences that divide their subjects, not on what unites them” (51). It took quite a long for people to understand such imperial politics. In some sense, the entire episode of throwing pig at the mosque’s steps seems to indicate the active role of the British politics in igniting communal violence otherwise there is no reason for Murad Ali, a Muslim to do so. As long as Hindu-Muslim fight with each other, the British can rule them, once they are united, the rulers are in trouble. This fact was realized by the British in 1857 rebellion.

The history has also recorded the facts that there was not a single communal riot that took place before the British came to India. Richard says, “these people know only what we tell them, most people have no knowledge of their history” (41). It shows the success of colonialism in making Indians slave; for those who don’t know their history, who are uprooted from their cultural roots, who forget their traditions are likely to be slaved. Bhishm Sahni interrogates these issues very seriously and shows routes of communal violence. By the time some people have realized it, the massive frenzy of communalism was already beating in the hearts of the country. A.K. Singh comments on the political nature of the British imperialists, “Colonialists, according to Marx, are largely thieves, businessmen and translators. British colonialists are, apart from these three, collectors, analysts and dividers.” It further becomes manifest in the dialogues between Richard and his wife Liza when he says, “in the name of the religion they fight one another; in the name of freedom they fight against us.” And Liza argues, “I also know a thing or two. In the name of freedom they fight against you and in the name of religion you make them fight one another” (50).

Since the British knew about these weaknesses, they took as much benefit as they could in maintaining the status quo of communal violence.
There is a local dimension to political space also i.e. the role of Congress in nationalism. We see them fighting internally on various principles of Congress. The character of Bakshiji is an ideal congressman whereas character of General represents attitude of Gandhian idealism. These are the people who are trying to pacify the communal riots but could not somehow. The novel satirizes failure of Congress’ project of nationalism and shows that Muslims of that time had no faith in Congress, for they used to believe that it is a “Hindu organization” only. Besides, other ideologies like communist collide with communal and nationalistic ideologies in pacifying.

Moreover, Tamas also reveals the role of religious organizations as active agents in the political space; they are fundamentalists rather than progressive ones. Religious organizations are the manifest workers of latent political engineering of communal turmoil; as they help in arousing in people hitherto forgotten or ignored “religiosity”. Many a times under the pretext of security, people are made part of the organization and thus vulnerable to other organizations. Such organizations automatically become communally powerful. For instance, a temple’s backyard becomes store house of weapons, “They had managed to procure all the necessary things except cauldrons that were needed for boiling oil. Everything had been arranged neatly on the windowsill-three knives, a dagger, and a kirpan. Ten lathis had been stacked in one corner of the room, each had a brass head with spikes at other end” (86).

Political space becomes stronger in executing the communal violence simply because religious organizations are their handy tools. Political space provides ideas which these organizations execute. Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate the two spaces. We have also seen in Lajja and Riot that religious organizations are motivated by political ideologies to such an extent that they try to undo historical wrongs like demolition of Babri Masjid. However, Tamas depicts them
more as organizations which train members of their community assuming that riot is going to erupt; in the preparation riot actually occurs.

Political space is more subtle in *Tamas* in so far as the power play is concerned. Here, we do not find characters who are craving for power or conspiring rather they are common folks. Richard is behaving like any British behaves; Hindus and Muslims behave like they behave in any other incident of communal violence. However, the colonial framework that the novel creates has political implications, role of political parties in partition accounts for political space.

*Laija* evokes some of those basic questions of political space that are generally found to be discussed in an academic setting; ownership of state, principles of democracy, secularist promises, majority and minority, language policy, national religion to name a few. Not only this, the novel strongly argues that communal tension before and after demolition of Babri Masjid, in Bangladesh is rooted into the political space only. It renders a series of examples to support the argument. The narrative tells us:

> The State of Bangladesh was founded on the basis of four major principles; nationalism, secularism, democracy and socialism. The country had worked long and hard for its independence...in the process, the evils of communalism and religious fanaticism were defeated. After independence, the reactionaries who had been against the very spirit of independence had gained power, changed the face of the constitution and revived the evils of communalism and unbending fundamentalism... (43).

The whole thesis is based on the historical evidences that after the independence of Bangladesh, the country was literally *Islamized* which later on used to harass the minority on communal ground. A policy level change in ideology—from secularism to fundamentalism—makes lives of many Hindus impossible. During his discussion with Haider, Suranjjan asks a set of questions which are the constituents of the communal formation of the political space of Bangladesh. As he asks, “by declaring Islam as the national religion, aren’t the citizens of this country who are not
Muslims deprived of the nation’s support (87)? This question is backed up by the situation of Hindus in Bangladesh. This argument lingers throughout the novel, “in Bangladesh the Muslims are in any case religious. It is not necessary to declare a national religion for them” (136). Such continuous protest indicates to the dangers of the policy; if Islam is declared as a national religion, people belonging to the other faiths in the country are left with three options: 1) they get converted to Islam, 2) they leave Bangladesh and 3) suffer, to the extent of death.

Since the very core of the novel is demolition of Babri Masjid in India, there is a great deal a comparison being made in terms of political spaces. First comparison is regarding rebuilding the mosques and temples:

Hasina is always talking about the reconstruction of the Babri Masjid, but in Bangladesh even if there is some hope of compensation for the Hindus, nothing is ever mentioned about the rebuilding of temples. They do not seem to realize that Hindus have not drifted into Bangladesh with the flood waters. We are as much citizens of this country as anyone else. We have the right to protect our own lives, property and places of worship (109).

Hence, the fight is for equality and fraternity. Second comparison is between the political parties (Jamaat-i-Islami in Bangladesh and BJP in India) and religious organizations along with their roles in nurturing communalism in both the countries. It compares, “the purpose of these groups was the same—the establishment of what might be called fundamentalism. If only religion could be taken off the political agendas of both the countries!” (133). “The Awami League thinks that it will surely get the Hindu votes…do you know, in some places they have themselves instigated destruction” (112). This is but obvious condition with all the political parties who run on vote-bank politics. Consequently, political space gives birth to the discriminations on communal grounds. For example, insofar as government jobs in Bangladesh are concerned, being Muslim is a must have qualification. As the novel justifies:
It is a fact that there are no Hindus of the rank of Brigadier or Major General. Out of seventy colonels, there is only one Hindu, there are eight lieutenant colonels out of 450, forty majors out of 1,000, eight captains out of 1,300, three second lieutenants out of 900, only five hundred sipahis out of 80,000. And there are 300 Hindus out of 40,000 BDRs. Talking about Secretaries, it is not only Hindus who have been deprived, there aren’t any Buddhists and Christians either. Nor are there any among the Additional Secretaries. There is only one joint secretary out of a hundred and thirty four (137).

If this data is taken to be true, which according to the writer is true, we can deduce that political space is totally controlling and ruining lives of the minority which is a kind of communal violence. We have got similar data on the way sizable portion of the country’s budget is increasingly devoted to the promotion of Islam through all the fields possible. All these illustrations reveal some gruesome pictures of the political space of Bangladesh, and for that matter any country which allows such prejudices. Political space in Bangladesh, as Lajja seems to espouse, is completely controlled by religious fundamentalism which leads to exploitation and oppression of minority. People’s faith in Islam, history and trans-territorial commitments are the most important polarizations that political space makes full use of.

The plot of Riot is woven by using threads from the fabric of political space. Tharoor has analyzed the political support to communal violence in the best manner possible: by using technique of multiple narratives. The novel defines, “communalism” as “the sense of religious chauvinism that transforms itself into bigotry, and some time violence, against the followers of other faith” (44). This definition assumes ‘religious chauvinism’ which is a political ideology in the current politics of India. Many people wonder how democracy works in India, for the country has great variety in almost every aspect of life: language, food, religion, dress, traditions etc. In certain sense, it is the war between democracy and heterogeneity of Indian life which is the space wherein communalism can have status quo. Lakshman tells Priscilla, “It (democracy) has worked Priscilla. We have given passport to a dream, a dream of an extraordinary, polyglot, polychrome,
polyconfessional country. Democracy will solve the problems we are having with some dissatisfied Sikhs in Punjab; and democracy, more of it, is the only answer for the frustration of India’s Muslims too” (45).

It is therefore pretty much clear that communal violence takes place in India as the political space has full scope for it. There is going to be one or the other dissatisfaction regarding rights of religion, language, caste, region etc among one or the other groups of people. And if democracy does not treat everyone equally, even for the good of the masses, people having personal interests will take hold of the entire political space by using democracy against itself. The best example is the firmness of Ram Charan Gupta when he says, “It is people’s wish that the birthplace of Ram must be suitably honored. If government will not do what is necessary, the people will. We will rebuild the temple” (53). Isn’t it snatching away the political space “politically”!

*Riot* argues that Ram Janmabhoomi Procession and the violence that it led, could have been stopped provided there was a political will. The government played double standards; Lakshman describes how the political space was not ready to stop the procession:

I asked to ban the processions in my district. I was denied. Only West Bengal, where the communist have a pretty firm hold on power, actually banned the Ram Sila Poojan program. The other state governments were trying to have it both ways. The proclaimed their secularism but did nothing to maintain it. They didn’t want to alienate the Hindutva types, so they refused to ban the Ram Sila Poojan. They probably thought to give them some credit, that banning it would simply give the Hindutva movement the aura of Martyrdom and so help them attract even more support. So they let it go ahead. There were certainly some in the government who had a sneaking sympathy for the cause of rebuilding the Ram Janmabhoomi temple. Not just sneaking; many expressed it openly. So the government’s inaction in the face of all this provocation profoundly alienated the Muslims. For many of them, their faith and hope in Indian secularism, built over four decades of dogged efforts by successive administrations, soured (72).

So far we have understood three aspects of political space: (a) the government as political space, (b) power-mechanism, monitory interests, urge to subjugate as political space and (c) both a & b
as political space. Indian democracy is facing problems with all of them. The first type fights elections and makes policies, the second one is shared by all kinds of people who are interested in gaining by looting, and the third one is found mostly in the allies of political parties and religious organizations. If political space does not stop violence, which has been incited by it, the efforts of those working for building secular space go in vain. Once a group of people is alienated, it takes prolonged time to win its trust. The criticism of the first type of the political space is possible because of novel’s bold and secularist stand. Lakshman explains Priscilla:

Why should today’s Muslims have to pay a price for what Muslims may have done four hundred and fifty years ago? It’s just politics, Priscilla. The twentieth century politics of deprivation has eroded the culture’s confidence. Hindu chauvinism has emerged from the competition for resources in a contentious democracy. Politicians of all faiths across India seek to mobilize voters by appealing to narrow identities. By seeking votes in the name of religion, caste and religion, they have urged voters to define themselves on these lines. Indians have been made more conscious than ever before of what divides us.

The vote-politics has taken lives of many in the past fifty years. The day to day Indian life space has been made impossible without direct/indirect help of the political space that decides people’s sacred and profane spaces. Hence, everyone is taking keen interest in making his/her share prosperous by indulging into communal activities. If one political party is entirely based on religious organization’s support, the other would try to canvas the other religious group. In such a situation, communal space is activated to serve the urgent needs of the political space.

Not only that, political favouritism to the rioters shows that political space is inclusive of communal space. In fact one can say that communal space cannot reach up to violence unless there is back up of political space. When riots start in Zalilgarh, police arrested the suspects. A local MLA comes rushing to rescue them but Lakshman takes her to task for her political stand:

Are you representative of just one community, and not of this whole town? The last few days, when hundreds of Muslims were arrested, beaten, dragged by their beards, and placed behind bars, often on mere suspicion, even though many had no criminal records, no complaint against
them, I never heard even a whimper of protest from you. But last night, because ten men have been arrested, after complaints in which they were directly named as guilty of murder, you march here within two hours and shout of injustice? How dare you (176)?

Such an overt political pressure that MLAs have on the police have been a consistent factor during the riots in India. There are very few officials, like Lakshman, who have resisted to this political space. The rioters feel secured and safe in anything they would do because they know that their types in power are going to save them. That is how the very political space that runs the country is communally biased. There is yet another example of the democratic loopholes of the political space. It is when criminals from two different communities committing the same crime are treated differently the court of justice. Gurinder Singh, SP in Zalilgarh says:

But you should know that the Sessions Court released the accused Hindus on bail within a frigging week. The Muslims who had been rounded up in the bomb case are still being refused bail. The DM went to see the fucking district judge and said, “I have never tried to interfere with the judicial process. But here-the same riot, the same offenses, the same sections of the Penal Code-how can there be two such openly different standards for people of two communities? It is not an ordinary case. It is a question of faith of whole community in the system of justice in our country (178).

Double standards of the systems alienate Muslims more and more and the rift between the two communities gets wider and wider which would serve as proper ‘space’ for violence, direct or indirect. It is not good for the healthy society wherein a community constantly feel insecure and threatened and if the majority and the country both are secular, such occasions are the key events to prove it. On one hand, the system discriminates the equals and some religious organizations work to wipe out the other community on the other. One is indirect violence and the other is direct one. Ram Charan Gupta says:

Muslims are like a lemon squirted into the cream of India. They turn it sour. We have to remove the lemon, cut it up into little pieces, squeeze out the pips and throw away. That is what we have to do Mr. Diggs. That is what the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajarang Dal, the Shiv Sena, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the associated organizations of our political family, the Sangh Parivar, will do one day (57).
Such religious organizations have audacity to articulate their aims loudly and clearly in democratic country which shows they are working with full support of the political space. Not only that, we have seen the execution of their “aims” in the atrocious violence in the past few decades. However, it is interesting to note that writer does not mention any Muslim organization which exists with similar intentions.

*Partitions* interrogates with some of the perennial facets of political space which gives us better idea of why the communal violence that we face is like this only. Larger policy level decisions create permanent problem for the masses. As the decision of partition continuously haunts us in the sense that how few individuals decide where millions of people would reside. The dialogue that the novel presents between Mountbatten and Jinnah is worth considering an evidence of political space. Mountbatten says:

‘You had asked for Pakistan and we are giving it you. The world thinks and knows that Pakistan will never come into existence, but the British Crown is handing it you on a platter’... Jinnah gazed at Mountbatten, only too aware that in the game of political chess, he was mere a pawn in the hands of the British. He was being paid back in his own coin-Pakistan! History stood witness-the Indian blood coursing through his veins froze at the realization and mutual obstinacy, minor acts of discourtesy and overriding arrogance had given birth to never ending hostility. Fostered by hidden personal rivalries, such animosity has shattered the dreams of the masses, leaving in its wake bigots handicapped by illusions of religious superiority (44-45).

In majority cases of the communal violence, it is the personal reason which turns, made to turn, into the communal shape. Political space always looks for such “mutual obstinacy” to be manipulated for personal gains. The british not only partitioned the country but created a political space which keeps on partitioning hearts and heads of the people of both the countries. And Jinnah became the common villain for those Hindus and Muslims who suffered in communal violence of partition:

All that bloodshed took place because of Jinnah’s weakness, Mountbatten’s conspiracy and Iqbal’s despairing verses. Jinnah was obsessed with immortalizing himself in the pages of history. The price was paid for his obsession is there for all to see. Iqbal was a talented poet,
but his constant struggle to obliterate his Hindu heritage, turned him into a dangerously bigoted man (146).

People like Iqbal has to take their stand in the emerging political space of Pakistan and when he did people could not help but to abuse him and his poetry.

During the fight for freedom, quite often it was realized that many agents for freedom were becoming communal and that helped to actualize the otherwise impossible partition. The novel comments on the rise of Hindutva and feebleness of the secularism in India:

It is true that Gandhiji did all he could, but by then, the English had taken advantage of the situation. And what happened later? Eventually, it was Lokmanya Tilak who would be instrumental in rallying together the Hindu rightists. Even a progressive like Savarkar became one, and his generation produced Gandhi’s assassin Nathuram Godse. What hope was left for the Muslims despite the presence of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Maulana Azad? Suspicion had crept into people’s minds that as soon as power was transferred to Nehru, secularism would gradually lapse into a dormant state, while Hindutva, which had been passive all this while roused itself (94).

Such activities in political space gave birth to the urge for power in the independent India. People like Gandhi and Maulana Azad were losing their impact on the masses because the political space had started showing them dreams of dominance in future India. Muslim league and Hindu Nationalism began imagining different versions of the independent India which was hitherto one. Many secularists anticipated partition, as Abdul Gaffar Khan says in the novel, “when religion is manipulated for political ends to engender hatred on one, but many Pakistans are born” (126).

The political space has always manipulated history and told us that Muslims emperors created the gulf between and Hindus and Muslims by destroying temples. But *Partitions* gives us some historical sources in the form of dialogue telling us a new story. Babar confesses in the court of Adib, “I had come to conquer Hindustan for myself, not in the name of Islam. I sought a kingdom and acquired it” (57). Thus, the political space made us identify Mughals with Islam.
but it was not so. Historians in the novel argue, “All the invaders who came to Hindustan from bin Qasim to Babar—were driven by the medieval lust for fame and riches. They were not crusaders of Islam. It was not Islam that attacked Hindustan, but Muslims who were driven to do so by their selfish medieval aspirations and feudalistic values” (166).

It was just lust for the kingdom and wealth that they invaded, it cannot be simply considered as the attacks on Hindus. In fact, Babar attacked a Muslim king as well. There is yet another interesting argument that the novel presents on how the concept of nation in India was never based on religion, “Though Hindus were in a majority in the country, Hindustan was never a Hindu state. No visible or religious evidence of Hindu nation existed at the time. Power politics in Hindustan was never grounded in Hinduism. There was no state religion as such. Hindus revered their faith, but were free from the politics of religion” (226).

The issue of majority does not decide a country’s religion to be the religion of the majority. It is the politics of religion that created all the communal violence that we have today. Political space of the novel makes use of historical evidence as and when required in order to justify that the disease of communalism is based on the personal-political aspirations of the rulers from ancient to modern era. People will keep on indulging in the acts of violence until they realize such motives of the political space.

4.6 ‘Socio-Psychological’ Space and Communal Violence:

‘Socio-psychological space’ is a location wherein the dialogues between social institutions-aspects like religion, economy, identity, community and psychological realms of human mind and behaviour take place. It is here that we would like to see how community and individual are one and separate when it comes to communalism.
*Tamas* is a microcosm of Indian society by all the measures; cultural and political to be specific. It tells us so nicely the process of the communal riots. It further complicates the issues of class, caste and religion which are the very pillars of the socio-psychological space wherein communal tension develops. Sahni gives an apt description of how communal violence changes as per the castes and classes. The exposition of the novel tells us that the town is the perfect social setting which helps communal feelings to grow. As the morning in the town opens itself, in the words of Sahni:

> Just then, a woman, her head and shoulders covered, stepped out of a house with a katori in her hand, mumbling words or prayer. She was obviously going to a temple or gurudwara to offer her morning prayers. How calm and peaceful were the beginnings of the day’s business. To cap it all, the sound of an ek-tara from somewhere. It was some fakir on his morning round. Nathu was familiar with the voice but never set eyes on the fakir. He had heard him singing softly, particularly during Ramzan (29).

Such is the social space of the town wherein Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs share happy co-existence. As the novel is located in the time few weeks before the partition, we get to know its impact on the town too. When the local Congress workers lead a *prabhatferi* (a morning rally in which people sing devotional and patriotic songs) with slogans “Komi Nara, Vande Mataram” and “Bharat Mataki Jai”, they are stopped by the Muslims from entering a Muslim locality. They were shouting slogans “Pakistan Zindabad” and “Kayade-Aazam Zindabad” (36). So, simultaneously such subtle tension of space-encroachment and resistance were also growing within the social space of the town. The mixed space is also a problem for Hindus to form Mohalla committees:

> It not easy to form Mohalla committee here. Muslims have infiltrated every Mohalla. After the riots in 1926, two or three such Mohallas did come which had exclusive Hindu and Sikh population such as Naya Mohalla, Rapura, but in other mohallas the Muslim and Hindus are present in a mixed population. How can you form Mohalla committee there (77)?
Here, *Tamas* describes one of the most complex aspects of the spatial distribution of residence of communities. The distribution of mohallas on the basis of communities is a problem; areas which have only one community and those having mixed population. Reason being, if communities live in closed mohallas, they feel safe and protected psychologically but create illusion about the conspiracy and assumptions for the other community which also lives in the similar space. In the mixed population, vulnerability of victims increases physically due to proximity of opposite spaces.

In such a social space, what happens if somebody throws a dead pig on the steps of the mosque is the story that unfolds many aspects of psychological spaces. After the pig incident, all the communities have literally started preparing for riot; for safety and attack. Religious institutions turned into weapon houses, religious preacher started engineering schemes for riots, leaders of the town began inciting each other, and mentors like Dev Vrat started brainwashing young minds like Ranvir. Psychologically, Ranvir’s training to kill is an example of how violence can be injected by stories of valour. Ranvir has a clear picture of the enemy, Mleccha, Muslims:

Mlecchas are unclean people, they don’t bathe, don’t even wash their hands after toilet, eat from one another’s plate, they have no regular hour for going to toilet. Mleccha would appear before Ranvir’s eyes again and again-in his neighbourhood, the cobbler who sat by roadside was a mleccha, the tong-driver who lived right opposite his house was mleccha; Hamid, his classmate, as a mleccha, the family that lived in his immediate neighbourhood was also a mleccha family (82).

Having developed anti-muslim outlook, the same boy stabs an old man during the riot and feels so proud of it. *Tamas* is about this psychological space which develops gradually and penetrates into the veins of social space and it paralyses it. As we have discussed, religious festivals are the most vulnerable spaces for communal conflict because they not only provide an open space but
also people to be attacked on. Religious festivals, on a social space, comprise great deal of emotionalism, solidarity and power at the level of psychological space. In *Tamas*, we notice that:

Once a year, on the occasion of Guru Nanak’s birthday, Sikh procession would be taken out and tension would grip the city. Will the procession pass in front of the Jama Masjid, with its band playing or will it take some other route? There was a fear that even a stray stone flung on the procession might lead to a communal riot. Similarly, on the occasion of Muharram, tension would mount when Muslims would take out tazias, beat their bare chests and shout ‘Ya Hussein! Ya Hussein!’ perspiration dripping from their bodies, and pass through the streets of the town (115-16).

The psychological factor of “mob-mentality” also affects the process, as mob has no face to blame the start of the riot. These festivals are celebrated near religious places (near God, so to say!), the very aim of wiping out enemy and his/her God completely, might help to satisfy rioter’s deep psychological urge. Along with many aspects of psychological space, the festivals provide more of opportunities to disturb the harmony of social space.

There is yet another dimension of communalism that *Tamas* discloses, the economical dimension. Today, there is a consensus among the critics on communalism that economic reasons are the most powerful reasons for riots. For example, the character of Lalaji who is safe or feeling safe just because he has money, as Sahni considers him as “man of means”:

In reality, he was quite safe too. He was a man of means and lived a spacious house, and was, besides, a prominent citizen. Who would lift his hand against a man of means? Muslim families lived in his immediate neighbourhood, but most of them belonged to the lower strata of society. Besides, being a businessman he had dealings with many Muslim traders and was on cordial terms with them. What was there to be afraid of (150)?

Does this mean that having money can give you opportunity to live and power to kill? If we observe the victims of any communal riot in *Tamas* or in real life riots, most of them are from economically backward classes of the community. Increasingly, in the backdrop of deepening economic tragedy, communal riots are engineered with financial support by the rich people of both the communities. One more example can be cited in order to explain how entire fabric of
social space is distributed on economic ground, as “the pucca double-storyed houses were of Hindus and single-storyed mud-houses were of Muslims, or, to use Dev Datt’s terminology, of the deprived classes”(182). Laija also indicates to this dimension of communalism.

The frenzy of communal violence is so complex that we fail to understand human behaviour. It is really impossible to see any attempt to preserve and practice human values in the time of communal riots. However, in the case of Harman Singh and his wife we have to take a pause and ponder over it. When they took shelter in Ramzan’s house and caught, Ramzan wanted to kill them but could not. Sahni justifies:

Twice Ramzan raised his pickaxe to strike, but both times he let it fall. It is one thing to kill a kafir, it is quite another to kill someone you know and who has sought shelter in your house. A thin line was still there which was difficult to cross, despite the fact that the atmosphere was charged with religious frenzy and hatred. Ramzan stood there for some time, breathing hard and then, uttering abuses, went out of the house (269).

Isn’t this one of the most unexpected behaviour during communal riots? This indicates those deeper aspects of psychological space which are governed by cultural space. That is how Tamas is not only a fine analysis of the communal violence but also excellent interpretation of collective and individual human behaviour.

Laija is a story of a family which loses almost everything due to a communally damaged society. Besides, it presents a weak society wherein people are more concerned with names, religious identity than love and bonding. Both Suranjan and Maya, brother and sister, have to sacrifice their love because inter-religious marriage is next to impossible in Bangladesh. It is this social space that we are exploring wherein the institution of marriage needs communal approval and failure in which gives birth to the ghostly characters like Suranjan.
Time and again the identities of the characters become the great hurdle at all levels of life. Sudhamoy and his wife Kironmoyee stopped wearing their identity makers/markers. A character called Akhtarujjaman said to Kironmoyee, “Boudi, you don’t wear sankha and sindur, do you?” She looked down and answered, “Not since 1975.” Fast came the reply, “Thank God! At least you can be sure of your safety. It’s better to be safe than sorry” (59). Worse than this, the entire family had to change their names for seven years when Sudhamoy was known as Abdus Salaam, Kironmoyee as Fatema, Suranjan was called Saber. Though this was an outcome of a disturbed social space, it had its repercussions in psychological space at individual level. Suffocation, nausea, fear, anxiety, demoralized self etc. have become their stable psychological space.

The feminine space within the socio-psychological space gets oppressed in/out communal disturbance. The characters like Kironmoyee and her daughter Maya are the consistent victims. Kironmoyee always plays a scarifying mother and a wife without ever asserting herself. Her only priority is the well-being of her family. Her condition is well articulated in the narrative:

At times her silence would infuriate Suranjan. Did she have nothing to say about her sick husband, about her son who was only present body, so to say, or her daughter who was lost? Was she made of stone that she did not react to anything at all? Did she leave nothing to oppose? How strange she was—unresponsive, unrelenting and as unemotional as a corpse (194).

On the other hand we have Maya who represents those women who get abducted during riots, she is molested at the age six which shows how society treats women. She is so protective about herself, now, that she chooses to refuge in a Muslim friend’s house when her family is simply incapable of doing anything; especially the idealist father and a careless brother. Her kidnapping is not a direct attack on the feminine space, but on masculine space of the father and brother in order to teach them the lesson; here feminine space becomes a tool to be used to serve communal purposes. Finally, it is only Maya who pays for her family’s inability to protect her and the
feminine space is dishonored. For Maya and Kironmoyee, males are problems irrespective of whether they are Hindus or Muslim, their own or strangers, lovers or oppressors. Thus, in communal space, women’s honour is the first casualty.

Suranjan who is intellectually disillusioned and frustrated and he is in need some sort of avenge or psychological relief from the burden of loss of his sister due to his carelessness. Consequently, he gets hold of a prostitute, for him she was not a whore but a girl who belonged to the majority community. He wanted to rape one of them to revenge what they had done to his sister. The narrative tells us, “Suranjan had cooled down now and a heavy weight had been lifted from him” (201). His catharsis found different manner for purgating his frustration. Suranjan is a product of that communal space where being intellectual from minority is the second danger on existence.

Religion as an institution for teaching right conduct has become a decisive factor in shaping and reshaping one’s communal identity on one hand and communities have no other relationship than reciprocal communal violence on the other. Impact of such social space can be seen in the way characters behave in their psychological spaces. Isn’t it strange, then, that individuals want to make their presence felt through religious symbolism, want to take all the benefits that come with it and do not want to have the adverse impact of such attitude on the members of other religious community?

The way Hindus are treated in Bangladesh and Muslims in India creates strong prejudices against the enemy community; this prejudice becomes a source to instigate violence as and when needed by the political parties. The incidents of communal violence are stored in the memory, collective and individual, which can be “used” as an additional fuel during the next similar events. Sudhamoy and Suranjan are full of such experiences which constantly keep them worrying about
their safety. Thus ‘prejudice’ and ‘memory’ are inevitable part of the communal cycle. Lajja lists hundreds of incidents of violence like killings, rapes, plundering of property, destroying of temples etc. in order to suggest that this is the way to wipe out “them” so that “we” can be safer.

Apart from that, the economic reasons also work in bringing about suppression of the poor Hindus and Muslims. When the editor of Ekta magazine once tells Suranjan, “Do you understand, Suranjan, all these are cases of the strong oppressing the weak, the rich oppressing the poor. If you are rich, it doesn’t matter much if you are Hindu or Muslim” (50).

*Riot* espouses various socio-psychological dimensions of communal space while relating them to the other spaces like historical and political ones. There is a common prejudice and “us/they” psychology at work within the social space of the country. Ram Charan Gupta tells Diggs, “Muslims are evil people, they could not abide the thought of us Hindus asserting our pride” (58). On the other side, Professor Mohammed Sarvar argues that, “Where do Indian Muslims like me fit in? I have spent my life thinking as part of “us”-now there are Indians, respectable Indians, vote winning Indians, who say that I am really “them”!” (114). Even intellectuals have this type of bifurcating psychology in the manner they deal with communal violence. Such reciprocal attitudes are hindrance for the seculars who want them to unite for a happy coexistence in the ‘social space’.

Violence is subject to preconceived notions like majority and minority within the socio-psychological space. To what extent the issue of majority and minority can be said responsible for the communal violence? *Riot* takes up this question and Professor Mohammed Sarvar rationalizes it:
When the Great Mughals ruled on the throne of Delhi, were Muslims a “minority” then? Mathematically no doubt, but no Indian Muslim thought of himself as minority. Brahmins are only ten percent of the population of India today-do they see themselves as a minority? No, minorityhood is a state of mind, Mr. Diggs. It is a sense of powerlessness, of being out of the mainstream, of being here on sufferance...no one can make you minority without your consent (115).

It occurs at the level of appeasing the minority by the politicians of one party which makes the minority an aversion for the opposite party; for both the parties minority is a political issue for votes. Majority or minority is name given to the power-holding class of the people, the same can be used for violence against the powerless.

During communal riots, *Riot* tells us, inter-communal slogans play vital role in igniting feeling of hatred among each other. These slogans are the products of psychological space, most of the times injected by the political space and create permanent repugnance for each others. For instance, here are the inciting slogans shouted during the processions leading to riots.

\[
\text{Musalmam ke do hi sthan/Pakistan ya Kabristan (There are only two places for a Muslim/Pakistan or the cemetery)}
\]

\[
\text{Jo kahat hai Ali Ali/ Uski ma ko choddo gali gali (He who calls out Ali Ali/ fuck his mother in every alley)}\]

Sometimes slogans are shouted for the members of their own community. For example here are some slogans for Hindus shouted by Hindus:

\[
\text{Jis Hindu ka khoon na khaule/ Koon nahi hai pani hai (The Hindu whose blood does not boil has water in his veins)}
\]

\[
\text{Jo Janmabhoomi ke kaam na aaye/ Who bekar Jawani hai (He who does not work for the Janmabhoomi is a useless youth)}
\]

\[
\text{Mandir wahn banayenge (The temple will be built there)}\]

Such provocations are also printed in leaflets for the wider circulations which work as a continuous fuel to the fire of communal violence. Such slogans infuse immediate fear and as a result the other community also starts preparing for the protection and attack. Simultaneously,
the rumours keep increasing the fear and that is how psychological space of individuals and community is the soft target during riots.

Riots have economic reasons for eruption and people get economically weak during and after riots. For instance, in order to control violence, curfew is imposed. Curfews generally work to stop the violence but it has its own by products. As it happens in Zalilgarh; many women defied curfew on the second day by complaining, “There is now not a grain of food or a drop of milk in our homes. Our men have either been rounded up by the police or have run away and are in hiding. We earn and eat from day to day. It’s all very well for you to impose a curfew. But how long can we let our children starve (166)?

The issue of class cannot be neglected during communal violence; here curfew is imposed to stop violence but it causes another type of violence on the masses. The riots disturb the economic stability of the social space and that is why perhaps we have to agree with the assumption that if one is rich, it doesn’t matter whether one is Hindu or Muslims. And if we conduct survey of the people who have lost their lives in communal violence, most of them belong to the lower middle class.

Besides riots, there is a psychological perception among the masses about the way Muslims carry themselves with certain marks of their communal identity. The Muslims are accepted to wear certain stereotypes of the minorityhood otherwise they are not “Muslims”. Riot discusses problems of the Muslim Personal Law as a law that was designed by the political space and imposed upon the social space. Professor Mohammed Sarvar protests, “The Rajiv Gandhi government’s action on Shah Bano was pure political opportunism; it was a sellout to Muslim
conservatives, but a betrayal of Muslim women and Muslim reformers. Why stigmatize the community as a whole when many amongst them too lost out in the process (114)?

Nevertheless, this law only covers marriage, divorce and inheritance and does not account for those who are not subject to it. Such political decisions have helped in nurturing anti-Muslim feelings for those Hindus who already have some prejudices about them. Therefore, religious organizations, political conspiracy at the level of policies, contesting identities etc have generated room for fear, prejudice, violence etc. among the masses.

The very composite of social space is made of psychological spaces of the individuals. Therefore, in order to strengthen socio-psychological spaces which give birth to the communal violence, the agencies of political spaces should be secularized in the best sense of the term.

*Partitions* goes deep into layers of socio-psychological spaces with a view to finding out the roots of communal violence. For example, it gives a taxonomic account of the four aspects of human nature necessary to balance the socio-psychological balance, “All Hindus and Muslims are aware of the four things dear to every human being: the first is one’s religion, the second, one’s honor and pride, the third, one’s life and the life of one’s loved ones. And the fourth, one’s freedom and one’s ancestral property” (311).

When there is any danger found hovering these things, people tend to be violent just to make sure that they assert themselves properly and powerfully. If we take a close look at the nature of these four aspects, we would realize that during communal violence, people attack and protect these aspects only, for they are the makers of one’s individual and collective identity. By putting
religion as the first thing that people like to protect shows the importance of religion in the socio-
psychological space.

Where does violence come from during communal conflict? It comes, as *Partitions* seems to
suggest, from the feeling of hatred:

Hatred determines man’s identity and caste today. The past comes in handy to unite hatred,
especially those painfully bitter memories that ooze and fester. History, which can provide
remedial insights into the past, it often cast aside. The analysis of history, its perspectives on
society often appease and serve to eliminate hatred. But the past spurns this logic of countering
hatred. It merely weaves half truths into tales of actual recollection and perpetuates these tales
for centuries. Hatred is a “school” where one begins by inflicting pain, humiliation and
suffering on oneself. Hatred then enriches the soil of ill will and strengthens the resolves of
revenge. Similarity and uniqueness serve as the hallmarks of revenge whose practitioners speak
in one voice, raise identical questions and offer the same arguments. This unity forges their
identity (83).

Hatred accounts for a range of aspects of human life: memory, collective history, political
polarizations. As we have discussed in the political space that during acts of communal violence,
personal experiences of communalism are given communal turn and in doing so hatred plays
significant role. Communal hatred disturbs the social space; it is operated at the level of
communal identities. For example, a secularist Muslim in the novel tells, “Such people just go
around rousing feelings to fever pitch and inciting others o violence…it never occurs to them to
wonder what will happen to Bharat. First they tried to create a Hindu-Muslim divide here. That
didn’t work. Now, they are trying to foment trouble between the Shias and the Sunnis.” (72)

Well, it depicts the harmonious communal space which could not be affected by the political
space. It reveals that political space is not as powerful as the social space of the communities and
psychological space of the individuals. The communal identity is frequently put under communal
scrutiny, as a character says, “we are Hindus from Kashmir, but in Hindustan we are known as
Kashmiris” (50). The very act of identity formation is an act of violence. These processes of
formations of communal identity foster mutual prejudices. For example, “A man from Shiv Sena interrupted: Do not let yourselves forget that Muslims are barbarians. They don’t spare their own people. How could they spare us? Iran and Iraq—both Muslim nations—fought each other for eight long years” (173). And these prejudices are used during communal violence for instigating masses. The identity makers are solely responsible for the communal attacks, as Salma tells Adib, “I am wearing saari and I want you to see how Hindustani women are treated by men at Lahore airport. Normally, they make things difficult for women…more so, when the women happen to be Hindustani” (89).

Within the social space, gender space suffers a lot during communal violence, especially females. Females are the first victims of the members of other community on one hand but they are also victimized by their own community. For example, Salma tells Naim “It, most certainly, is Naim Sahib, any man is allowed to break away from your brotherhood and still remain the master his destiny. But you and your brethren look upon women as chattel. If, having gone through a traumatic experience, a woman turn to a man outside your community, people like you refuse to put up with it” (110).

The novel presents an incident wherein a Hindu girl goes to teach in a Christian area and some local Hindu boys have objections; she is accused of converting the students. Finally she is raped by the same boys.

Thus, socio-psychological spaces are the cause and the result of the communal violence.

4.7 ‘Curfew’ as a Controlling Space:
Communal riots are often followed by curfews imposed by the authorities in order control the situation of communal violence. The word “curfew” is derived from the “couvre-feu”, French phrase, suggesting “cover the fire”. It was used to describe the time of blowing out all lamps and candles. It was later adopted into Middle English as “curfeu” which later became the modern “curfew”\(^{30}\). Curfew refers to a signal or time after which people remain indoors. In so far as Indian scenario of communalism is concerned, ‘curfew’ is not a new word for the people. In certain sense, as Vibhutinarayan Rai might put, they are quite used to it.

**Curfew in the City** is an articulation of a different kind and times. So far, we have discussed literary works analyzing of communal violence; causes, political spaces, effects on socio-psychological spaces, gruesome violence etc. The novel, *Curfew in the City* takes on a different trajectory altogether in telling us what happens after riots and before the regular peace i.e. during curfew. As C.M. Naim, the translator puts it in the forward\(^{31}\) of the novel:

> The narrative focuses on how the curfew affects the simple, mundane matters in the lives of ordinary people; a sick child cannot get medicine; a family cannot get drinking water; a girl cannot walk down the street in safety; people cannot stay indoors in security; a dead child cannot easily be given a decent burial. But the political and civic leaders and journalists go on living their lives of privilege. They do not lose their privileges. The under-privileged are denied even the little they had (12).

Here, the novel gives a fresh definition of curfew i.e. curfew is a time after a riot when your basic freedom to live peacefully is taken away.

It simply tells us about the nature of curfew; it is meant for the sustenance of the communal peace but pushing the “rioters” back to their homes by imposing law and order. Apparently this is how curfew works, however, reading *Curfew in the City* tells some of the latent aspects of curfew from an insider’s perspective (Writer himself, as a Senior Superintendent of Police, observed curfews). Can the space of communal violence be controlled by imposing the space of
curfew? To what extent? What are the side-effects/by products of curfew? These are the few questions that we would like to explore.

Since it is the narrative of the sufferings of the Muslim minority in India, it starts with the description of the imposition of the curfew on a Muslim area of the city. The very beginning of the novel depicts the background to the communal tension wherein rumours play active role. For instance:

For some time now there had been a rumour that Muslims were making preparations to attack the police. The dread of such an attack had grasped the heart of the average policeman. There had been other riots in the western part of the state in which several Muslims had died from police bullets. That, the rumour claimed, was why the Muslims were angry. It was said that if Muslims found any policeman alone in their neighbourhood, they wouldn’t leave him alive. Consequently, in the recent couple of days, no policeman had gone into the Muslim areas alone or even with just one more man. Whenever a need arose, the police had always gone fully armed and in groups of four or five, including a Sub-inspector (20).

During communal riots, the power is generally in the hands of the rioters from both the communities but as soon as the curfew is imposed, the power shifted to the police and army. *Curfew in the City* portrays dismal picture of how police “uses” that power to oppress the minority by discriminating them in almost every possible manner. The rumours as mentioned above keep the bias of the police intact towards Muslims. We have some very obvious rumours creating an atmosphere of communal heat, as Devi Lala tells Hindus, “Scores of dead Hindus are lying in the gutters’. The police have taken hundreds of corpses in the trucks and dumped them into the Jamuna” (38). Such rumours naturally instigate the psychological space of the majority. Lala intensifies his narrative by saying, “Musallas are running all over the place….flashing their knives and daggers. Poor Hindus….they have no one to protect them” (40).

In such a provocative air, riot take place and finally curfew is imposed. The moment curfew is declared, it affects the space of everyday of life. For example, Rai depicts that moment:
‘What happened, sister?’
‘Karphu…karphu….Ya Khuda, get us home somehow’

But every homeward step was a problem. Crowds kept rushing out from every direction. Shopkeepers were desperately gathering the goods they had spread out on the ground. Then there were the ekkas, rickshas, bicycles and cars, jostling with each other to move forward. The broad street that on other days was sufficient for its traffic now looked crowded like a narrow lane (33).

The way entire lane gets activated shows that people are damn scared of the curfew itself; the novel gives reasons for the same. It is more of a threat to life than a kind of protection to life. Curfew as a controlling space “partially” controls the communal activities and actually suppresses people to live a bare minimum life. For example, a Muslim dies during the riots and his family cannot even mourn properly due to the fear of both the rioters and the police. And when they cry in suppression, narrator tells us,

   It was a most curious kind of wailing, as of several women were trying to cry out their grief, but someone kept choking them. Suppressed cries have their own unique effect, chillingly penetrating and heart-rending. The present wailing too was of the kind. It could have shaken the core even the most hard-hearted man (24).

The family members of the dead had to literally hide the injured person by assuming that taking him to the hospital may cause many more deaths, asking for help from the police may be futile exercise. The police came to that area fully-armed and with the feeling that they are going to be attacked by the Muslims. Unfortunately, when the police came for the help, it was too late and the injured one died. The question is; did he die due to the riot or curfew?

As we have discussed earlier also that communal riots are always surrounded with stereotypes and prejudices. Here, too, like many other real cities of Indian, the city has labeled the ghetto of Muslims as Pakistan, which is again a heterotopia:

   Simultaneous with the curfew, a number of other things occurred on their own. For one, certain part of the city was termed ‘Pakistan’ and the people there were declared ‘Pakistanis’. That was the area between Johnsonganj and Atala and between Khuldabad and Mutthiganj. A couple of times every year, the people of the rest of the city were bound to declare the people of that part to be ‘Pakistanis’ For the past several years, whenever a curfew was declared in the city, it
would actually be in that part alone. The city beyond that area would be happily lost in its own, oblivious to any incidents over there (31).

Every riot creates a new Pakistan, as an enemy for the rest of the city. People living in this area, Pakistanis are first linguistically declared foes of the majority and subsequently tortured during riot and curfew. The general attitude of Indians towards Pakistan, the country, easily gets diverted to the Pakistan, the Muslim area of the city. History comes handy to revenge the partition memories. In the novel, ‘curfew’ has two separate meanings for both the communities, for Muslims apart from its dictionary meaning, it is as good as a systematic-legal way of torture and for Hindus it is just an on paper remaining in the houses for a while. The novel, for example, gives a surprising account of how the curfew works topsy-turvy:

The curfew was a frequent affair, and the policemen were accustomed to having an evening meal either in this lane or the one next to it. After enjoying the food and spending some time pleasantly joking with their hosts, they would amble off to the ‘Pakistani’ lanes to impose the real curfew...In every riot, the police always made sure to teach the Pakistanis a lesson; this time, too, these special reports were going to come handy for that purpose (43-44).

Curfew which is supposed to harmonize the violence but it is actually used here to “teach lesson” to the Muslims by increasing violence. If curfew is not functional for its intended purposes, it is not the ‘curfew’ in the true sense of the term. On contrary, it becomes extension of the communal riot and turns out to be a ‘pogrom’ wherein a community is targeted. How are Muslims “taught lesson”, one wonders? Well, there are two very specific ways: (1) to deprive them from their earning means and (2) through “searches” supposedly hidden weapons. The novel reveals:

The only worried people were those who earned their wages daily; they knew that the longer the curfew extended the less food there would be on their plates. During the past few years, the ‘rulers’ of the city had always delayed lifting the curfew until they were convinced that the citizens had been fully taught a lesson. For the daily wagers, however, just a couple of days of curfew were enough to make them cry (45).
The community is skillfully punished with the help of ‘curfew’; people cannot protest or else they will be considered to defy the law of the curfew. Secondly, the curfew disturbs the economic stability of the family which ultimately makes their condition worse. Noticeably, social space of a community is controlled by the space of the curfew; it is often a political decision to extend the curfew for longer period of time. We have observed in the *Riot*, how women, victims of starvation, came on the road to protest against the curfew. Fortunately, for them the magistrate was a secular person who could understand and solve the problem unlike the situation in the *Curfew in the City*. The police acted mischievously in executing the “lesson” about which Rai seems to be very critical.

Second cruel way of teaching them a lesson is through the “searches” for the supposedly hidden weapons in the Muslim houses. The novel unfolds the truth that it is not a “legal” search but a legal robbery by all inhuman and oppressive means. As during the searches, they have looted gold jewelry from the middle class Muslim houses that people have safely kept for their daughters marriages. When the authorities sanction order for the house searches, police carry out them like the following manner:

Khat...khat...thak....thak! Open up, you bastard. Get off your mother’s lap. You want me to kick down your door.
Noises resounded everywhere and filled the air. Noises of fists beating on doors, of boots kicking down doors, of sticks striking human backs and bellies. Triumphant shouts and curses.
Cries and screams. Pleading voices. Begging voices. Voices of children and women. The maelstrom of noises appeared suddenly and churned up the entire neighbourhood (96).

It is easy to make out the method by which common people are being “taught the lessons”.

Really, the curfew now “controls” the household of the Muslims. The police not only have an unfailing tool of bent law which they are using against the Muslims but also the feeling of being members of the majority community for whom minority is a problem! These searches spare
houses of the upper class Muslims like Haji Badruddin who have their political allies with the upper class Hindus like Jaiswal. Not that there is no resistance from the victims, the novel records one:

You watch silently while this goes on. Is this how a search is conducted? What law gives you the right to strike people without due cause? I was once a lawyer. This country has a constitution. There are laws…there are rules…
‘Lawyer’s arse! You think you can teach us law?
No old mouth remained ever received a rifle butt and remained to face anything (98).

The words “constitution”, “law” or “right” seems to be shallow during the curfew for those who have been given power by the same words, in a particular sense. After ruined by the rioters in some or the other ways, the Muslims have to face such agony as long as there is a curfew. Perhaps, that is why the rumour we discussed earlier about Muslims attacking the police seems to have some truth in it. Hence, the law and order is “used” to impose all that the Hindus want Muslims to go through in the space of the curfew. In other words, a curfew is an opportunity for police as members of the majority community to take revenge to the Muslims with the help of legality. Loyalty of the police is at stake here and Rai, being a police officer, does not hesitate to expose it.

_Curfew in the City_ revolves around Sayeeda’s family wherein her daughter dies of cholera because she could not get medicines due to the curfew imposed. How do we make sense of this incident? It cannot be said that Hindus have killed this child but the curfew did. Not only that, her dead body cannot be buried during the curfew because people are not allowed to come out from their housed, not even for such reasons. Grief stricken Sayeeda cries out, “Hey Maula…my _bitiya_ didn’t get any medicine when she died…won’t she get a decent grave (71)? Don’t rules and regulations of the curfew provide any solution to such emergency situation? It does provide, there is a provision of _‘curfew pass’_ by holding which one gets certain kind of freedom in the
curfew. Now the issue is who gets it and how? In order to bury the dead child, Sayeeda’s father in-law goes to the magistrate’s kotwali for demanding the pass. After all sorts of problems, he gets it but while he is returning, he faces obvious hindrances that an average Muslims does:

On the way back he was stopped by the police a couple of times, but the pass had filled him with a special kind of confidence—even though it was severely shaken few times. Once, a policeman grabbed the pass, turned it over and over to examine it, then threatened it to tear it up. Another time, a jawan actually threw the pass in the air and let it fall in the dirt. But the new confidence—and his abject humility—still let him reach home, slowly, but certainly (76).

Such humiliation of Muslims by the police is depicted with a journalistic precision. Even if the law allows them to use the curfew pass, police, as representatives of the law, do not allow such privilege. The political leaders easily get these passes to visit the riot-venues but common men and women cannot get them without begging even for situation like burial. Thus, curfew is the real pain in the neck for everyday life.

Apart from what has been said about the extent to which the space of curfew can create havoc, we should also see an episode narrated in the novel that further unfurls questions of gender space during communal violence. Can the curfew, as a controlling space guarantee safety of gender space? Curfew in the City describes incident of rape of a teen girl who, according to the writer could be from any religion, who became victim of the curfew. When she was returning from school, she was pulled in by three men and raped despite her pleadings. All the people who saw the girl being pulled in closed their windows. Rai tells us, “…irrespective of her caste or religion, a curfew can deprive any girl of her life’s tenderest experience. It can knock her down to the level of animals, and drag her through experiences that could turn the rest of her life into an inescapable labyrinth of nightmares” (66).
Besides, this incident not only shows brutality of the males, irrespective of their caste or religion, but also the rottenness of the entire social space which actually allows such incidents happen in front of their eyes. This is how *Curfew in the City* is a novel exploring time-space of ‘curfew’ imposed upon a particular community in order to control their lives; society, economics, relationships, females, basic facilities etc. The novel is a literary submission of a policeman on what happens if curfew creates new forms and means of communal violence during controlling it!

**Conclusion**

The chapter has ventured to interpret the post 1970 Indian novels on communal riots from a spatial perspective by focusing on the ‘communal space’ which includes various overlapping spaces like ‘sacred’, ‘historical’, ‘heterotopia’, ‘political’, ‘socio-psychological’, ‘curfew’ etc. The novels that we have discussed revealed some of the unnoticed flashes of ideas and ideological dimensions when put under spatial scrutiny. Space, the chapter has tried to argue, is increasingly becoming a potential framework to understand and solve problem of communal violence in post 1970 India.
Endnotes:

1. pp. 309-335, Gabriel Zoran discusses these three layers in his essay Towards the Theory of Narrative Space published in the Poetics Today, Vol. 5, No. 2

2. Retrieved from islamicwallpapersfree.blogspot.com

3. Taslima, Nasrin discuses this issue on her website: http://www.taslimanasrin.com/index2.html too when she says “Murders are rampant, women are being raped, they are committing suicide. Ever since religion was made the guiding force of nation-building, torture on humanity has been on the rise. Fundamentalism destroys the amity between people. If this is not criticised, we will not have right-thinking people around. Without this, religious sentiments will keep the nation years behind in everything.”

4. 430, Aaj Ke Atit, Bhishm Sahni’s autobiography

5. Ibid, 428

6. pp. 72, Chamanlal, discusses how imperialism is at the backdrop of Tamas in his Communalism, Colonialism and Tamas published in Aalochana, 2004

7. In the introduction of his Meta History: The Historical Imagination 19th Century Europe White Hyden discusses “what does it mean to think historically, and what are the unique characteristics of a specifically historical method of inquiry? These questions were debated throughout the nineteenth century by historians, philosophers, and social theorists, but usually within the context of the assumption that unambiguous answers could be provided for them, “History” was considered to be a specific mode of existence, “historical consciousness” a distinctive mode of thought, and "historical knowledge" an autonomous domain in the spectrum of the human and physical sciences.”

8. In their book The Political Abuse of History Sarvepalli Gopal et al, argue that “Hsuan Tsang writes of Ayodhya as a major centre of Buddhism with many monasteries and stupas and few non-Buddhists. For Buddhists Ayodhya is a sacred place where Buddha is believed to have stayed for
some time. iii) Ayodhya has been an important centre of Jain pilgrimage. To the Jains it is the birth place of the first and fourth Jaina Tirthankaras. An interesting archaeological find of the 4th-3rd century BC is a Jaina figure in grey terracotta, being amongst the earliest Jaina figures found so far.”


10. When I say history that people live with in Indian context, it includes mythology and oral history as its inseparable parts.

11. Ashish Nandy in his essay “History’s Forgotten Doubles” discusses that many times what happens is when we read Western commentary on Indian’s history, we take it as an attack and try to gloss it over through “glorious” past, for example, when Hegel said “as Indians do not have any history in the sense of historiography, they do not have history as action, i.e. no development towards a truly political status,” we get disturbed and start arguing that constituents of Indian history are radically different from those of the western history. However, we tend to forget that the lack/absence of historical thinking and writing (tebula rasa) might lead to inscription of ambiguous history which can cause disaster and we have an example of Babri.


14. There is no archaeological evidence to show that at this early time the region around present day Ayodhya was inhabited. The earliest possible date for settlements at the site is of about the eighth
century BC. The archaeological remains indicate a fairly simple material life, more primitive than what is described in the Valmiki Ramayana. In the Ramayana, there are frequent references to palaces and buildings on a large scale in an urban setting. Such descriptions of an urban complex are not sustained by the archaeological evidence of the eighth century BC.

15. After the seventh century, textual references to Ayodhya are categorical. The Puranas, dating to the first millennium AD and the early second millennium AD follow the Ramayana and refer to Ayodhya as the capital of Koshala. (Vishnudharmottara Mahapurna, 1.240.2)

16. In a way, the local tradition of Ayodhya recognizes the ambiguous history of its origin. The story is that Ayodhya was lost after the Treta Yuga and was rediscovered by Vikramditya. While searching for the lost Ayodhya, Vikramditya met Prayaga, the king of tirthas, who knew about Ayodhya and showed him where it was. Vikramditya marked the place but could not find it later. Then he met a yogi who told him that he should let a cow and a calf roam. When the calf came across the Janmabhoomi milk would flow from its udder. The king followed the yogi's advice. When at a certain point the calf's udders began to flow the king decided that this was the site of the ancient Ayodhya.

17. Even in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Ramnandis had not settled in Ayodhya on a significant scale. Shaivism was more important than the cult of Ram. Only from the eighteenth century do we find the Ramnandi sadhus settling on a large scale. It was in the subsequent centuries that they built most of their temples in Ayodhya.

18. It certainly put a big question mark on the Tulsidas’ version of Ramayana. Further secularists say that it is in the nineteenth century that the story circulates and enters official records. These records were then cited by others as valid historical evidence on the issue. This story of the destruction of the temple is narrated, without any investigation into its historical veracity, in British records of the region.
19. In his *Ayodhya: A Case Against the Temple* Koenraad Elst cites Prof. Kamal Salibi of Beirut who has proposed the theory that all the Biblical sites including Abraham’s Hebron and king David’s Jerusalem, were situated in the Hejaz area of Western Arabia (in his 1985 book *The Bible Came from Arabia: a Radical Reinterpretation of Old Testament Geography*). The double political motivation is obvious: undermining Israel’s historical legitimacy and giving a foundation to Islam’s claim to an Abrahamic heritage including the *Ka’aba*. Established Bible scholars have dismissed this theory as wishful thinking.


22. Out of 900 dead ones, 575 Muslims, 275 Hindus, 45 unknown and 5 others. The causes for the deaths are police firing (356), stabbing (347), arson (91), mob action (80), private firing (22) and other causes (4).

23. Ashish Nandy in his article *History’s Forgotten Doubles* argues that neither Balkrishna Munje, nor Keshav Hegdewar, nor Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, not even Lalkrishna Advani nor Murali Manohar Joshi, the leaders of the movement demanded RamJanmabhoomi on its historical grounds.

24. Ibid, 18 Along with this, he also question the very nature of history around which such controversy could happen.

25. Ibid, 23

26. Ibid, 65
27. Shashi Tharoor in one of his interviews said about *Riot* that “the themes that concern me in this novel: love and of hate; cultural collision, in particular, in this case the Hindu/Muslim collision, the American/Indian collision, and within India the collision between the English-educated elites of India and people in the rural heartland; and as well, issues of the unknowability of history, the way in which identities are constructed through an imagining of history; and finally, perhaps, the unknowability of the truth.”

28. His views resemble to the views of secular historians on the debate. Further he also talks about rise of Muslim regime and “the position of Hindu women, who had traditionally been quite free, changed for the worse. Women were to put into purdah, away from the prying eyes of the Muslim conquerors, Islamic attitudes towards sexuality and male dominance…Someone ought to do a Ph.D. on the role Islam in the sanctification of Rama”.


31. C M Nain considers “Rai’s narrative as not about the ‘riot’ itself, or rather it is not about the killing and pillaging and raping, the events that were very much the focus of the narratives of the stories that were written about the riots of 1946 and 1947. It is not a story of people gone barbaric in the heat of a moment of passion or revenge. It is about cold, calculated greed and blind, senseless hatred.”
References:


