



Wounded and Screaming Humanity in Bhishma Sahani's "Tamas"

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Abstract – Bhishma Sahani's "Tamas" (1973) is considered one of the most powerful and passionate fictional accounts of the wounded and screaming humanity that marked the period. There is the sensitive depiction of the communal riots and barbaric killings that accompanied partition of 1947. The naked dance of the death was continued for a long period of the eve of the partition of the Indian subcontinent. Thousands of the common and an innocent mass – Muslim and Hindu people became victims of the sectarian violence. The communal madness was the mentality of all sects like the Muslim, the Hindu, and the Sikh which caused the bloody human tragedy.

Keywords – *Barbaric, passionate, wounded sectarian, victims.*

Sectarian Hatred –

On the eve of the partition of Indian subcontinent, the political persons and the British rulers directly or indirectly fanned the sectarian hatred among the Hindus and the Muslims. The religious persons also helped to these communal elements. Every page of the present novel lights on the sectarian hatred in the Hindu sect against the Muslim sect. Generally, the true and pious religious leaders of all religions pray for the universal peace and love. But in partition period, the true

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Religious leaders also were disturbed. For instance, in the present novel

‘Vanparasthi’ is holy man, who was respected by all. But in communal atmosphere of partition, this holy and respectable person was also disturbed. When there was an insult of the Hindus, he gave religious orders to the Hindus against the Muslims.

He calls the Muslims as ‘Malecchas’ in anger. He personally supervises and coordinates the Hindu youth wing ‘Akara’. His holy residence becomes a centre of meetings of the Hindus and the Sikhs against the threat of the Muslim aggressiveness. He does not want the Hindus to be cowards and lay low. One more example is of ‘Master Vrat’ in the present novel.

‘When he was small, Master Dev Vrat used to tell Ranvir stories of valour. There was one of the Rana Pratap for the first time became conscious of his helpless situation when the only piece of bread left with him was eaten up by a cat. Ranvir would imagine Chetak, Rana Pratap’s horse, galloping away on the hills on the outskirts. He would see Shivaji on horseback, poised on high rock looking towards the Turkish horse in the distance on holding his iron embrace the malecchas.’

Bhishma Sahani describes the communal fury of the Sikh sect against the Muslim sect in Sayadpur village. The communal speeches of the community leaders, the singing of the war songs in the gurudwara before the entire Sikh congregation fan the sectarian spirit against the Muslim sect. In the present text the following concluding words of a song are meaningful in this context:

‘The Khalsa shall rule

Name shall remain in subjugation.’

Everyone is ready to lay down the lives on the name of heroic past against the Turks. One Sikh leader namely ‘Sardar Teja Singh’ gave a spiritual address to Khalsa congregation to be ready to shed their blood in the service of “Guru Maharaj”. The text describes it:

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‘For most of them, this was no time to bother about dress, since the heart was afire with the spirit of do or die.’

Further he appeals in the following words to put everyone’s faith to test:

‘Sacrifice! Sacrifice!! Sacrifice!!!’

On the other hand there was also the sectarian hatred in the Muslims against the Hindus and the Sikhs. The present novel describes the communal fury of the Muslim sect that the Muslims always

call the Hindus as ‘Kafar’ in anger. They think that the Hindus are their religious enemy and political envy. So they demand for partition to create ‘Pakistan’ as their separate nation. Their communal slogans prove their sectarian mentality:

‘Allah - o - Akbar!’

‘Nara – e – Taqbir – Allah – O – Akbar.’

And

‘Pakistan Zindabad!’

‘Quid – e – Azam – Zindabad.’

(referring to Mr. Jinnah)

Harnam Singh’s tragedy –

Bhishma Sahani describes the tragedy of an old couple Harnam Singh and his wife Banto who reside in Dhok Ilahi Baksh village. In the whole village it was only one Sikh family among all other Muslim families since a long time. But this helpless Sikh family was compelled to run away by the murdering Muslim mobs from outside village. The text describes it as:

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‘No sooner had they stepped out of the house that the entire place became alien to them.’

Sikh Muslim Communal War in Sayyadpur –

Because of the lost of faith by the news of the communal riots in the town, the Sikh of Sayyadpur gathered in Gurudwara to plan to be safe from the murdering Muslim mobs. On the other hand, the Muslims also gathered in Sheikh Gulam Rasul’s two storey house, who were ready for Jihad. As a result, the attacks from both sides took place. A bitter fight took place. It continued two days and two nights. As a result, seven dead bodies covered with white sheets in Gurudwara. Not only this but a few dead bodies were scattered here and there in the village. It is nothing but the people those who were living side by side in one lane and side by side houses, they were killing to each other only for the cause of religion that one is the Muslim and the other is not

Muslim. The different religion made them enemy. Because of the religions, they broke human relations, and the humanity got the bloody wounds.

Sikh-Muslim Tragedy –

There was the communal riot in a small town in North-West Frontier province (now in Pakistan) and also in the nearby villages to which Bhishma Sahani was an eyewitness. ‘Tamas’ is based on that bloody experience. The common people were deeply affected in the sectarian disturbances. The communal riots in the early months of 1947 in Punjab were of sectarian violence which had brought human tragedy. No doubt the Muslim political leaders were behind this human tragedy, but at the same time the Britishers were equally responsible for it. Dashrath M. Panchal observes:

‘British, for obvious strategic reasons, initiated and furthered the communal hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims. It resulted into two-way exodus, desire for revenge, massacre, looting, arson and rape on a very large scale.’

(4)

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