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PROBLEM OF PLACE, SPACE AND PARTITION IN BHISHAM SAHNI'S NOVEL *TAMAS*

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Abstract

Human beings adapt themselves according to the environment they live in and create their own space among others for better survival in society. The geographical and societal space they acquire gives them a sense of security and a sense of belongingness. If this space is taken away by dislocating them, it leads to mental and physical vacuum which is experienced across generations. A similar problem of space can be traced back in the history of India, when the partition of the country into India and Pakistan took place. People who were living in one town from many generations were dislocated on the basis of religion they belonged to. Feeling of security and belongingness they once enjoyed was snatched from them and they became an outsider in their own country. They were forced to migrate from one place to another and were left with only alternative, to readept themselves to create their new identity. Real accounts of such vacuums caused by partition can be seen in Bhisham Sahni's novel *Tamas*. Hindu and Sikh families of Small-Town province were caught in the fury of political turmoil of Partition due to religious riots that broke out leading to massacre, suicide, abduction and rape. Peace loving people who enjoyed space in their homeland were dislocated in the name of religion. Hindus and Muslims of one town who were friends and neighbors all their life turned into enemies and fought with one another to destroy the space and identity of people on the basis of petty issues. In the proposed paper the researcher aims to analyse the effect of partition in deconstruction and reconstruction of space and the strategies adopted by characters to relocate themselves in alien environments and geographical space.

Keywords: Place, Space, Partition, Migration, Dislocation, Belongingness.

The game of power politics can be traced from the clash of Satan with God as mentioned in the Bible. In which Satan tried to claim over land and power of God, thinking himself equal to God. This game kept continuing on earth as well, when nations started capturing each other to prove their superiority over others, giving birth to colonization. 'Colonization' according to *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* is "the act of taking control of an area or a country that is not your own, especially using force, and sending people from your own country to live there". In the history of the world, British ruled almost all over the world which resulted in political and cultural conflict.

India also became a part of British colony, as they entered the country on the pretext of trade but gradually overtook the land and its people and ruled over it for nearly two centuries. With the rise of education and influence of renaissance various religious, social and political groups such as Arya Samaj (1875), Prarthana Samaj (1857), Bahamo Samajh (1828), Indian National Congress (1885) and All India Muslim League (1906) etc came up. The rising trust in national culture and formation of new Indian political parties vented way for national movements and revolts against the British such as Sepoy Mutiny 1875 also called as Indian Rebellion or first Independence war of India. Various movements were initiated under the leadership of Gandhiji like Non-cooperation Movement (1920), Quit India Movement (1942) etc. Protests and sacrifices of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh, Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah, Mangal Pandey, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Ashfaqulla Khan and many more compelled the British to free the country from its clutches. Understanding the ongoing agitation among the people British decided to leave the country by giving it freedom accompanied by partition.

Few political leaders aspired to rule over the nation individually and applied all kinds of force to achieve their aim "as early as 1940 Nehru is reported to have said that the Partition was preferable to any postponement of independence"(Butalia 59). Menon and Bhasin have also described partition as "the unfortunate outcome of sectarian and separatist politics" (3) The political parties initiated communal based riots demanding an entirely different nation for Muslims. This blind assertion of their personal belief and the British initiation, divided the whole country into different sects formed on the basis of religion and ethnicity, finally leading to India's division into two parts that is India and Pakistan, Pakistan being formed on the basis of religion.

The partition of the country caused the problem of Place which can be defined as a geographical area in terms of material existence; as millions of people were dislocated and forced to migrate from one country to the other in search of a place to live in. On the other hand division of geographical area created problems of space in the people; as thousands of people had to leave their birth and work place in which they had been living comfortably for generations and were enjoying a favourable psychological space in the heart of the people. They were forced to go to an entirely

new land which was entrusted to them on religious basis. Thus division of India caused the problem of place and space which led to chaos and turmoil. It affected the people of both the nation, physically as they were uprooted from the geographical place that they once occupied and mentally as they lost sense of security and belongingness due to religious fervor. One of the survivors in an interview said, "Now there is no country. Earlier we had home, a country, because we belonged there. Now we belong now where... The real country is the one we have left behind. That was our real home, the home we loved. Relationships were stronger, families looked after each other. All that has gone finished." (qtd. in Menon et.al. 220)

Along with the geographical division of the nation into India and Pakistan which was caused by British, religious division also took place. Politician's animosity with each other instigated the believers of Islam to move to the new land as it would consist of followers of same religion and culture and would bring greater opportunity in their life. This shifting of place by thousands of people on religious basis was both voluntary and involuntary which resulted in physical violence, mental disorders, murders, abductions and rapes, disrupting the mental space. "In a relatively short period, from 1946 to 1951, an estimated number of twelve twelve/fourteen (according to different calculations) million people crossed the border, either way, between India and Pakistan, about one/three million people died and between 75,000 and 1,00,000 women were raped and abducted." (Bruschi 4) People of one area started claiming the land according to religion and forced the people of other religions to move to the other side of the newly created border. Government took advantage of this situation to make their hold on people and land and supported the miscreants which led to chaos and disturbance. Dislocation brought drastic change and psychological turmoil in the lives of thousands of people who once enjoyed physical and mental space leading to feelings of uncertainty. The effect of dislocation can be well understood by the analogy of roots of a plant. A root expanding in the narrow creak of the rock shows its ability to make space and adapt itself according to its surrounding. Humans do the same, when they try to establish themselves in a new environment. They bring about few changes in themselves and try to amalgamate with others, only to make themselves belong to a particular place, to gain security and to have the sense of belongingness. If the plant whose roots have adjusted well in the creak is pulled out and placed in the fertile land with the other roots of its kind, thinking that the soil is its right place to nurture, then the root will slowly perish away, consequently drying the plant. It happens due to the change of environment in which the roots have already adjusted with. Likewise if people, who have adapted themselves to one place, are dislocated on the basis of caste, religion, lifestyle etc, face a lot of problems of relocation and re-establishment in a new life in foreign land leading to insecurity and chaos.

Examples of such chaos and insecurity can be traced through several characters in Bhisham Sahni's novel *Tamas* as they are forced to move out from well occupied space to an unknown place. An old Sikh couple Harnam Singh and Banto were the only Sikh family of their village and were deeply engrossed in its culture where everyone was living in perfect harmony by following their own ideology and profession. The old couple owned a tea shop which was famous in all communities and it was the place of all social, religious and political discussions as well as community building. Harnam and Manto had spent their whole life in the village and had married their daughter from this village therefore were deeply attached to their home and the people. Beginning of the novel shows peace and calm dwelling in the village and they feel secure in spite of knowing that the riots have broken out. Harnam Singh who is confident with their image in the village consoles his wife who fears the consequence of riots saying "Listen, my good woman, we have never thought ill of anyone; we have never harmed anyone. People in the village too have been good to us. " (Sahni 215) They both were comforted by the most respected man of the village and their old Muslim friend Karim Khan who also assured them "no less than ten times that we should continue to live here with an easy mind" (Sahni 215). But soon this friend only summons them to move away quickly as the miscreants from the other village had come to theirs and could harm them in an act of social frenzy. He advises them "Things have taken a bad turn, Harnam Singh. Your welfare lies in leaving the place as the marauders may come from outside. We will not be able to stop them"(Sahni 216). Hearing this, the old couple is forced to fly away in order to save themselves from those who had once enjoyed tea at his tea shop and were known to them. The consequence of Partition had made age old friends enemies and their own land was now foreign to them. Thus space which they had created in the hearts of others was taken away on the pretext of religion. They had become strangers to their own people, whom they had once considered as family and were part of their joys and sorrows.

Another example of space is seen through the story of rich Hindu Lalaji family living in the locality having many Muslim friends and neighbors. When the riots broke out Lalaji asked his family to move out but his wife resists saying "Why should you be so worried? Are you afraid of your neighbor? I am not" (Sahni 158), but soon seeing the harsh reality of riots they decided to move out to a Hindu locality at the thought of their grown-up daughters. "If anything untoward happens where shall we conceal our daughters?" (Sahni 158). As a rich merchant he enjoyed a very respectable and high place in the society but partition displaced all these well enjoyed spaces and placed the rich in the same position as the poor. The violent outrage of one community forced people of other communities to move to a secure place, where they would find similar tradition and culture. In doing so they had to leave all their materialistic things as well as disengage themselves from emotional attachment which led to mental trauma and problem of space for generations to come.

On one hand where Partition led to the problem of mental space on the other it led to displacement of thousands of people leading to the problem of physical place. The novel represents the psychology of people to safeguard their respective places by creating groups and committees. There is a Hindu group living together but is surrounded by Muslims. After the announcement of partition the Hindus collected together and suggested forming 'Mohalla Committees' who would consist of 'Volunteer Corps' and 'Youth Wings whose duty would be to help Hindu people in distress and fight during any riots respectively. "They began considering seriously how best to unite Hindu and the Sikh in large scale and draw up plans for joint defence." (Sahni 77)

During the Partition there was strife to occupy a geographical area by one community from the other as they believed that it was there right according to religion to live there. There was mass dislocation of people. Some men wanted to go to Hindu land, a place of similar religion while others did not want to leave their home land. Those who did not go became victims of strife which was indirectly initiated by the politicians. The British and keepers of law and order allowed mass violence, abduction of people in order to settle the periphery of the area. All Muslims living in Hindu area were brutally evacuated and vice versa during which their valuable belongings were also taken away. Harnam Singh and Banto had taken shelter in a Muslim house owned by Ehsan Ali, an old customer of Harnam; they saw their trunk being brought in the courtyard as a sign of victory. When several efforts by son of Ehsan Ali failed to break the lock Harnam Singh who was hiding in the loft, himself gave the key to open it. Their house which was built by hard labor and love was also burned down and all valuable and precious things were stolen away by their known people. Miscreants intruded into the house of people to steal the valuable things like jewelry, money, cattle etc. which they had left behind to be claimed when they would return.

During Partition many of them didn't even know where their rightful land belonged, as all these years they had been living in harmony and peace with people of other religions in land which they called their own. Such confusion of place can be seen through the people of Sayedpur in which "Sikhs were as proud of being the inhabitants of Sayedpur as were the Muslims" (Sahni 287). Both the communities claimed their rights over Sayedpur as it belonged to all. Sikhs who were little less in numbers were threatened to move out but due to fear and unwillingness to move out, they confined themselves in the local gurudwara of the village. They could not move out because they did not know any other place safer other than their own village as they had lived here forever. They preferred to die and face death in their own homeland by either jumping into the well with children or sacrificing one another with swords and kirpans. Nahal has dexterously described the whole scene of women of Sayedpur, jumping into the well. After having no hope of victory or survival against the Muslims, the Sikh women understood what they had to do to save themselves from enemies. Without uttering a word, they gathered around a well with their children in which "Jasbir Kaur

was the first one to jump into the well." (Nahal 293) She took the plunge of her death without uttering a word all she said was her Wahe Guru's name. After her followed a long queue of women, some married, some having a child or two and many were yet to be married, all were fated for the same doom. "Hari Singh's wife climbed up stood there for a moment, then pulled up her four year old son" (293) and threw themselves in the water of death. In this havoc few children were left behind who were later pushed by other women "Prem Singh's wife jumped down, but her son was left standing on the wall. The child was pushed into the well by Gyan Singh's wife, and thus sent back into the arms of his mother." (293) Urvashi Butalia a well known feminist critic in her work *The Other Side of Silence* has interviewed Basant Kaur a mass suicide survivor in which she narrates:

"Many girls were killed. Then Mata Lajjawanti, had a well near her house, in a sort of a garden. Then all of us jumped into that, some hundred... [sic] eighty four... [sic] girls and boys. All of us. Even boys, not only children, but grown-up boys. I also went in, I took my two children and then we jumped in- I had some jewelry on me, things in my ears, on my wrists, and I had fourteen rupees on me. I took all that and threw it in well, and then I jumped in" (qtd. in Butalia 158).

The reason for this tragedy is mentally devastating because the people of Sayedpur, did not know to which country they actually belong too because a person's native place is determined by his place of ancestors. The only land people knew and belonged to was Sayedpur; where they were born, played, married, worked and made family. They could not disengage themselves from their land and therefore couldn't find a suitable place to live in after dislocation. Same trauma can be seen through various other characters that fly from one area to the other trying to reach a safe and secure place. Many times situations also came when both the community claimed the same land unable to decide the boundaries. As mentioned in *Tamas* when the riots broke out people were running in the street to kill one another meanwhile recognizing their childhood friends whom they had played with, neighbors with whom they had shared food or colleagues whom they worked with. Nobody knew who rightfully belonged to that place or for what reason they were fighting for with one another. All they knew was that they had to leave their homeland because of the partition

To conclude with, the problem of Place and Space was the result of partition. This brought a vacuum in the life of people and gave rise to the problem of relocation. *Tamas* has widely shown the problem of dislocation aroused due to communal disturbances in various villages located across the borders. In searching for an ideal place and space thousands of families took shelter in refugee camps to reestablish themselves again. It was a traumatizing experience as many had parted with their families, lost their daughters in abduction, lost their houses and materialistic wealth and were now living without any place and had realized that they had no space in the hearts of people they once lived with. They were forced to evacuate their homeland and settle in land which was not their own.

Division and separation of human beings from its roots at any end of the world always creates vacuum in the life of survivors. Though the motive can be political or religious but it cannot fill the gap i.e. a mental space created by the loss of culture. The people who migrated from one place to another during the time of partition in India still longs for their native culture and lives through the memories. It's a high time to discuss these issues so that we can develop better understanding between the two nations and create a better world for Humanity.

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