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**MAKING SENSE OF FRAGMENTED BODIES ACROSS GENERATIONS:  
*TAMAS AND KITNE PAKISTAN***

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**Abstract:** What is the real extent of 75 years when discussing a traumatic event like the Partition of 1947, at least in fiction? In a bid to explore this, the article analyzes two Hindi novels divided by a span of 27 years: the first, Bhisham Sahni’s *Tamas* (1973), was considered an early and now classic fictional intervention (though late by the standards of some other Indian languages, such as Urdu and Punjabi) in the narratives of Partition, and the other, Kamleshwar’s *Kitne Pakistan* (2000), was published at the cusp of the new millennium. Much had changed in India over those three decades. Did these changes brought about by globalization, liberalization, and new technology also influence the representation of violence, communalism, and relationships between communities, maybe even an understanding of the causes of the Partition? While examining the differences in narration of time and space, as well as stylistic divergences, the article notes and highlights the different ways in which both the novels lack a hero and deals with the idea of hope and utopia that is read in the context of violence during Partition/Partitions.

**Keywords:** India-Pakistan, Partition, Hope, Utopia, Post-modernism

The year 1947 redefined the world in many ways, from the partition of several countries to the plans for reconstruction of Western Europe, better known as the

Marshall Plan<sup>1</sup>. It was also the year that saw a major restructuring of South Asia and violence leading to war and division in the territories of the Middle East, where the ghost of colonialism still stalks in the form of the neo-colonial policies of the Zionist state of Israel. The twinned Partition/Independence of India/Pakistan, situated in this momentous year, remains a site of frayed and contested “re-membering” in South Asian literatures. Hindi literature is no exception to this.

However, unlike the case of Urdu or Punjabi, Partition writings in Hindi did not appear immediately or very soon after the event. One of the early and seminal novels on this theme, *Jhootha Sach* [This Is Not That Dawn] by Yashpal, was published in two parts only in 1958 and 1960, as *Vatan aur Desh* [Homeland and Nation] and *Desh ka Bhavishya* [Future of The Nation], respectively. In the 1960s and 1970s, Rahi Masoom Raza, Krishna Sobti, Bhisham Sahni, Kamleshwar, and many others wrote in Hindi with increased urgency, even as the demons of communalism — one of the root causes of Partition — loomed large. Since the Noakhali riots of 1946, India had witnessed communal violence at regular intervals, though the decade following Partition was largely peaceful, if one does not consider the 1950 East Pakistan riots, resulting in the migration of a large number of traumatized masses to India. This changed in the 1960s, which were marred by the Jabalpur (1961) and Gujarat (1969) riots, whereas the 1970 Bhiwandi riots prompted Bhisham Sahni to write his masterpiece *Tamas* [Darkness] in 1972 discussing the fragmentation of society and identities<sup>2</sup>. Underlining the communal spirit that continues to grip postcolonial India, Richard Delacy, argues that such “communal divisions that were exacerbated by the partition of the country in 1947 appeared to have in no way lessened in 1973” (42). Similarly, the riots in Jamshedpur and Aligarh in 1979, the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, followed by those in Meerut (1987) and Bhagalpur (1989) left permanent scars on these cities. One of the most communally charged events in the history of India

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<sup>1</sup> The Marshall Plan was an U.S. financial aid program for Western Europe following the Second World War. It was aimed at restructuring European cities and industries ravaged by war through funding. The plan was announced by Secretary of State George C. Marshall in a speech at Harvard University in 1947.

<sup>2</sup> A novel based somewhere in Pakistan, set just before Partition, but in times when the demand for Pakistan was almost concrete. A dead pig is found on the stairs of a mosque, triggering communal riots in the small town, which spreads to the neighbouring village where Sikhs are cornered in a *gurdwara*. In the beginning, a group of political-social workers tries to resolve the tension in the town by appealing to the British administrator, who refuses to meddle in the affair, letting the riots run uncontrolled. The novel is divided in two parts where the first part focusses on the violence in the town whereas the second part is focused on the violence in the *gurdwara* in a village. The last chapter shows social workers coming along and appealing for peace, with some of them blaming the British for the riots.

occurred in 1992 with the demolition of Babri Mosque and the riots in Mumbai, leading to the surge of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power in the next six years. But that was not the end; communal violence and the targeting of minorities became a tool of Hindu nationalism, often termed “hindutva”, following the 2002 Godhra massacre. Again in 2013, communal violence took over Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh under the rule of a secular Chief Minister, Akhilesh Yadav. As recently as 2020, Hindu-Muslim animosity continued as rioting mobs raged in a part of Delhi while the then American President Donald Trump was visiting the country.

Various commentators and scholars have shown that these events had a strategy and a method in creating the mayhem which has been brilliantly underlined by Kamleshwar in his magnum opus *Kitne Pakistan* [How Many Pakistans?] published in 2000<sup>3</sup>. In this experimental novel, Kamleshwar presents a sweeping view of the history of the world, especially that of the Indian subcontinent, and addresses uncomfortable questions to all those who, in his view, shaped our world and the times we live in. Although the mood of the novel is of anguished, bruised humanity, traumatized bodies and relationships, it ends with a utopian idea of planting the Bodhivriksh under which Gautam attained the pure knowledge and became Buddha. The novel is an amalgamation of European mythologies, Indian history, and contemporary events narrated from the point of view of a man named Adeeb, an editor, writer, and intellectual, who, at times, doubles up as the judge of an imaginary court where he interrogates the Mughal emperors Babur and Aurangzeb, Indian viceroy Lord Mountbatten and scores of other historical characters. Adeeb is open to historians, saints, and historical figures, ranging from the Aztec emperor Montezuma to the “Hindu–Muslim” medieval Indian mystic poet-saint, Kabir. During these court interrogations, time itself features as a character and a place such as Hiroshima can come in to plead a case. Within these complex questionings and defences, Adeeb leaves the court occasionally to meet his lover, Salma, an Indian whose maternal grandfather remained in Pakistan when her pregnant parents migrated to India following the 1947

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<sup>3</sup> An experimental novel lacking a straightforward storyline, *Kitne Pakistan* is a metaphor for the fragmentation of countries based on religious and other forms of hatred in the 1990s. The protagonist of the novel, Adeeb, is a journalist and author who is acting as a judge in an imaginary court where historical characters from all over the world come and answer the questions posed by the judge. The novel not only discusses Indian history but also the history of colonialism. It begins with a personal story of Adeeb, impacted by Partition of 1947, and runs into the mythological story of Gilgamesh and then returns to the more concrete Mughal and colonial histories of India, interspersed with other stories related to the Partition.

Partition. Parallel to the plots of the court and his love affair with Salma run the fragmented bodies and stories of Vidya, Boota Singh, and Zainab, all victims of Partition.

Knowing the multifaceted background of Kamleshwar as an editor, journalist, film and television scriptwriter, and a novelist, the impetus of his most popular work, *Kitne Pakistan*, becomes evident. One might ask “Where is Pakistan in the novel?”, for it seems to be more about the world than the sub-continent specifically. However, as one reads the novel, it becomes clear that the idea of how many Pakistans is used as a metaphor for the ongoing violence in the world of the 1990s: in that sense, despite the initial assumption of the rash reader, the “Pakistan” in the title of the novel is not simply the Pakistan that was created in 1947. The novel is less interested in the actual partition than the reader might assume; it is a late twentieth century interrogation of communal and related violence that takes the Independence/Partition of India as both a historical vantage point and a metaphor for what is happening in the world in general. This metaphor can be interpreted as a fight within an individual’s mind in which consciousness is ruptured by the ideas of nationalism, religion, and caste. Kamleshwar explains: “For me Pakistan is not a geographical identity, it is a mentality of religious fundamentalism. Whenever this kind of fundamentalism will come into people’s mind, it will lead to partitions and problems” (Prasar Bharati Archives, 2020). Likewise, Jayita Sengupta terms Partition as “a metaphor of difference, marking off borders, both at the geo-political and personal planes, between the two religious communities” (2012, xv). From this vantage point, it is apparent that Kamleshwar is not using “Pakistan” to refer to the ‘Muslim’ state that was created in 1947; his “Pakistan” includes all kinds of fundamentalism, including the Hindu ones, as critic Ameena Kazi Ansari (also the translator of *Kitne Pakistan*) explains in one of her articles:

In the novel, ‘Pakistan’ is not the nation but a mindset of the leaderships that partition peoples and lead to indescribable agony. ‘Pakistan’, thus, becomes a central metaphor, a metaphor for the lines that have divided, and continue to divide, the hearts and minds of individuals, societies, civilizations and even divine pantheons (272).

For Kamleshwar, “Pakistan” is a mental state, and he is using the term religious fundamentalism for divisive lines created in different parts of the world in the name

of race, religion or sectarianism. Personal stories of trauma generated because of these events are as important as the events themselves.

Unlike *Kitne Pakistan* (2000), Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1972), a fictional story of Partition and the riots following it, appears to be more specifically located in the troubles of 1947. The reasons for this are not just generational – Sahni was writing from a full, adult experience of the events in 1947, having studied in Rawalpindi and Lahore, now in Pakistan, before he emigrated to India, while Kamleshwar was only 14 years old in 1947; he had been born and continued to live in unpartitioned Uttar Pradesh in India. *Tamas* is a direct and an essentially realist-modernist engagement with 1947, written by an author who crossed into India as a refugee; *Kitne Pakistan* is a metaphorical and, in global terms, postmodernism-inflected engagement by an author of the next generation. Separated by 27 years, the narrative structures of both novels are totally different, yet they employ similar structures of fragmented and anachronistic narratives, where the incidents become more powerful than the characters, which will be elaborated upon later. It will also be noted that Kamleshwar acknowledges all authors' writing on the theme of Partition, including Sahni, as they are referred to in the novel in a dialogue by scholar Imam Nazish from Pakistan:

The aadeb's acerbic references enraged Imam Nazish who retorted, 'At the time, you too were part of our group... along with Amrita Pritam, Kartar Singh Duggal, Mohan Rakesh, Bhishm Sahni and Devendra Satyarthi... to the extent that even people like Yashpal, Ashq, Agyeya chose to remain silent. After Partition, you did lay bare the traumatic scenes it had given birth to...but that was only in the role of honest onlookers. It was Manto alone who dared to throw Toba Tek Singh's corpse right on the unnatural border that divided the two countries [...]' (82).

One way, then, to examine the similarities and differences in these two novels is to focus more on how they deal with temporality and spatiality.

### **The Tropes of Temporality and Spatiality**

*Tamas*, published 25 years after the Partition, is considered one of the greatest novels on this theme. In his autobiography, *Aaj ke Ateet* [Today's Past], Sahni explains that

he started writing *Tamas* after Bhiwandi riots<sup>4</sup>:

I do not remember exactly when the riots began in Bhiwandi Nagar near Bombay [now Mumbai], but I do remember that I started writing *Tamas* after that. [...] Normally, I write in the evenings. I like writing in the evenings. Do not know why that day, early in the morning, after breakfast, I sat at [my writing] table. It happened suddenly, but when I picked up the pen and placed papers in front of me the memories of Rawalpindi riots came to my mind. The Congress office flashed before my eyes. My friends in Congress, Bakshiji, Yogi Ramnath, Baliji, Haqimji, Abdul Aziz, Mehrchand Ahuja, Aziz, Jarnail [...] Master Arjundas<sup>5</sup> [...] their faces began to flash before my eyes. I was submerged in their memories (205 & 206; translation mine).

As can be gathered from his words, the vitiated atmosphere of communal hatred during the Bhiwandi riots of 1970 triggered Sahni's turbulent memories and made him write about the menace of violence, Partition, and the communalism that he had personally faced in 1947. As historian, Gyanendra Pandey writes about the novel *Tamas*,

[T]he story [of *Tamas*] marked a return to a less subtle nationalist statement in which agents provocateurs and mysterious evil folk, pulling the strings from behind the scenes, misled an innocent and bewildered but brave people. At the same time, Partition was represented here in the likeness of a natural disaster, far removed from the run of daily life, in which human actions in fact played a smaller part than inexplicable fate. All of this is in line with what professional nationalist historians have offered up in the past. (23)

Pandey's reading is not meant as a critique; it states what the novel – written in a certain context and related to the extant resonances, intellectual and popular, of the Partition – set out to do. In its diagnosis of Partition, as paraphrased by Pandey, *Tamas* did not differ from the explanations offered by the national historians of a young country: while religious communalists on both sides could blame it on the mendacity of the other side, this option was not available to either scholars or

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<sup>4</sup> The Hindu-Muslim riots of 1970 occurred in Bhiwandi near Mumbai in the month of May. According to newspaper reports, at least 40 persons were killed and hundreds injured. In Bhiwandi alone, 300 were injured. The communal clashes spread to nearby Jalgaon as well.

<sup>5</sup> Some of these people also appear as characters in the novel.

secularists and leftists, such as Sahni. It, perhaps inevitably, made many narratives incline towards something like the consequences of a natural disaster than the result of human action, though, it can be argued, that this was not always the case: for instance, Saadat Hassan Manto's fiction powerfully highlights the human hands behind the bloodshed without blaming any side.

On the other hand, Kamleshwar was probably aware of this problem of professional historians and national historiography when *Kitne Pakistan* was published nearly three decades later. In fact, some national historiographies had already been contested in the 1990s by younger historians, more noticeably those associated with the Subaltern Studies group. Kamleshwar had started writing *Kitne Pakistan* in May 1990 and it took another 10 years to complete and finally publish it; it is not known whether he planned its publication to coincide with the start of the new millennium. In a note on the first edition of the novel, Kamleshwar clearly states: "This novel is a result of debates going inside the mind. Everything went on for decades" (7; translation mine).

*Kitne Pakistan* is a journalistic documentation of the period the author was living in, a period punctuated by a sense of loss and trauma. Despite focusing on the idea of Partition in 1947, and the violence and fragmentation of nation-states and bodies, it also underlines other major events of the 1990s, such as the wars and crises in Yugoslavia, Kosovo, East Timor, and Iraq, among others, that evoke the same metaphorical query: How many walled-in nations are we going to build all over the world? Unlike in Sahni's *Tamas*, in *Kitne Pakistan*, Kamleshwar expands his gaze beyond one historical event and writes about world history, mythology, life as a writer, feminism, religion, the colonial period, and even the Mughal period of India. In terms of time and space, the narrative is an experiment where Kamleshwar uses the trope of dialogues in a theatrical setting of street plays, film scripts, short stories, and poetry. In the words of critic Swayam Prakash, as mentioned in a letter to the author which was later reproduced in the introduction to the fifth edition of *Kitne Pakistan*, "Brechtian style of drama is used in a [Hindi] novel for the first time" (13; translation mine).

The book begins in the Allahabad of the Partition era, where the main character Adeeb falls in love with Vidya but never expresses it. In the second chapter, which jumps to the 1990s, when Adeeb is now an editor, he receives a mysterious letter from a woman and this triggers memories of Vidya. With this, the reader expects the story

to move somewhere back in time in search of Vidya or somewhere else in place in search of the mysterious woman who wrote the letter; instead the third chapter focuses on Adeeb, an editor, writing a letter to the prime minister of India about the Kargil War. In the following chapters, rather than delving into his journalistic works, Adeeb starts thinking about mythological stories from the Ramayana, the killings of Kaurava and Pandavas in Mahabharata and engages with the adventures of the Mesopotamian mythological hero, Gilgamesh. Stories of the worried gods of Babylon, Mesopotamia and Indus Valley follows. In between these ancient stories, suddenly, there comes the story of Boota Singh, a Partition victim, and with this merging of ancient and modern stories, Adeeb turns into a judge sorts (at the court of an intellectual). This abrupt juxtaposition of different spaces and times turns time into something much more alive and concrete than just a means of structuring a novel. In the words of Kamleshwar, “I had two problems in writing the novel. One, there was no hero or superhero in front of me, so I had to make time as the hero-superhero and the villain” (8; translation mine).

Hence, if *Tamas* is a concerted insertion into a traumatic period of the then-recent past, experienced personally by its author, and triggered off by a similar riot in the present during which it was written, *Kitne Pakistan* is an interrogation of time and space itself. The characters and their traumas in *Tamas* are reinserted into a recognizable time and place, but in *Kitne Pakistan* the characters are used to interrogating time and space, to framing the overwhelming question: how often and in how many more ways will we keep on creating ‘Pakistans’? Hence the novel’s title: *How Many Pakistans?*

### **Progress and fragmentation**

In *How to Read Literature*, Terry Eagleton writes, “There is a sense in which literary openings are absolute too” (7). It stands true for *Tamas* as well. It is such a work, that grips the attention of readers from the beginning. Let us examine the opening of the novel in Jai Ratan’s translation:

A clay lamp stood flickering in the alcove. Its tiny flame drooped and again winked back into life. Two bricks had fallen from the wall where it joined the roof, making a hole in it. As the wind blew in through the hole the lamp would waver, casting lurid shadows on the wall. Then the little flame would straighten up on its own, sending up



a thin column of soot which, after licking the arch of the alcove, dissipated itself in the air. Nathu was breathing hard, his chest heaving like a bellows. He suspected it was his breathing that made the lamp flicker. (Sahni 5)

The gory details of how Nathu kills a pig follow. Butchering a pig is normal in India and people domesticating pigs to kill and sell, but Nathu is not a regular butcher; he is a Chamar who skins dead animals. He has been asked to catch a pig *conspicuously* and kill it on the loud pretext that the veterinary doctor requires it. Nathu seems worried, but as a Chamar, the “low” or “untouchable” caste that skins dead animals, he is not able to question his employer, Murad Ali, who has paid him a handsome sum for the job. Despite Nathu not being a central character, the powerful opening of *Tamas* involves these three characters: Nathu, the pig, and Murad Ali. The setting is a hut in the late night infused with the stench of garbage, where Nathu can be seen with a knife in his hand and the stone slab that finally kills the doomed pig. There is an element of suffocation in the pages, with a powerful evocation of the smells and Nathu’s painful inability to kill the pig cleanly. His struggles become the struggle of the readers who almost perversely want the pig to be killed soon and move on.

This opening scene sets the pace of the novel — the communal violence in the small (unnamed) town and nearby villages triggered by the incident of the slaughtered pig thrown in front of a mosque. This was/is a typical trick to instigate riots, a trick easily understood by readers given the Indian cultural reference, for, as Eagleton also notes about openings, “[w]e can grasp the meaning of these opening sentences only because we come to them with a frame of cultural reference which allows us to do so [...]” (8).

However, Nathu’s struggle to kill the pig is not confined to the years around the partition in 1947. Between the lines of Sahni’s realistic description of killing a pig, one catches shadows of the young India of the 1960-70s, shadows not dissimilar from those in 1947. In the background, the Bhiwandi riots are looming large. This initial scene is itself set up in a larger context when the character of Nathu appears holding a lamp: nothing is known yet about Nathu, and not much will be known even by the end of the novel, except that he kills the pig, an act that results in the riots. But Nathu, who is yet to kill the pig in these initial pages, is worried, and his shaky breath disturbs the flame of the lamp. However, Sahni, in a clearly metaphorical description, straightens up the flickering flame of the initial pages of *Tamas* – a description that reflects both his

liberal-leftist sympathies and the faith of his generation in independence. The scene being imagined is concrete, and there is a progression from it to something else, though, as we see later, this progression is not easy or even complete.

Kamleshwar, on the other hand, writes in a different manner. The opening of *Kitne Pakistan* is abstract and the storyline of the first chapter does not lead us to the second chapter, but, before discussing this any further, let us take a look at the opening paragraph in the translation of the work by Ameena Kazi Ansari:

He recalls a long-forgotten tale.

He came from a desolate land, a world of silent allure, where nothing was ever said, aspirations tossed and turned within the mind, yearnings surfaced only to be eclipsed, and dreams were gathered and taken away like garments from the cloth line at dusk. Obscure, discrete reflection often remained entangled in memories, neither crystallizing nor fading into oblivion. These thoughts left their imprints on the fabric of his life in uneven patterns. (Kamleshwar 1)

The opening line, in the third person, does not reveal if what follows will be a memoir or a story, and becomes more abstract in the following line that states where the character comes from: this is simply noted as a desolate land. These lines are written like a diary entry where the character is reminiscing about dreams, aspirations, memories, thoughts, and their imprints. This description is followed by a paragraph about a *qasba* and a poem:

It seemed almost as if his entire Kasbah with its many windows gazed at him in silent supplication. Sometimes, the impressions of retraced steps could be made out in the dust after a light shower; [...]

Those were strange times.

Days passed like neem flowers drifting to the ground.

Days that resembled the yellow kaner blossoms.

Days that seemed like endless afternoons.

And then came days bereft of any direction. (Kamleshwar 1)

Then, just as the reader begins to expect a love story, for the narrator meets Vidya, a student, while they travel to their respective homes in the same train after their college holidays start, the narrative turns again. There is a long list of names of stations and

what one can eat at those small junctions interspersed with a paragraph about one particular station, Syed Sarawan, from where families of farmers are leaving for Aligarh and then to Pakistan. The chapter ends, yet the *he* is not introduced; but what is known is that he meets Vidya for the last time and she will not return as she was the last year of her college. Even in the second chapter, which opens in the late 1990s, Vidya is not mentioned anywhere except when the mysterious letter reminds Adeeb about Vidya, but he does not look for her. One learns much later in the novel that Vidya has migrated to Pakistan under extreme circumstances, and this is narrated as one of the three separate Partition stories in the novel, *not* as part of Adeeb's life.

This silence on the part of the author is important if we understand the background of Kamleshwar as an author for whom Partition and life in a mofussil town or *qasba* are the mainstay of all his stories. As a modern progressive liberal intellectual, he is worried about India in the context of the 1999 Kargil War and he sees this again as the result of Partition, as much the historic event of 1947 as a pervading mentality. As a journalist, he also thinks about the larger questions arising from the 1992 Babri Mosque demolition and other international events. For him, the opening of his story is just the beginning of the many questions and debates he has been struggling with. He confronts his readers with the questions he has in his mind which are related to civilization, mythology, history, religion, politics, and he weaves everything into the metaphor of Partition. If *Tamas* forces the reader back to 1947 to witness the tragedies of that time, while at the same time showing similar yet different influences of the event on the early 1970s when it was written, *Kitne Pakistan* uses the trope of Partition to move into the realm of endless questioning, using stories of fragmented bodies, for even the full recovery of stories is not possible, leaving the reader to make sense, if possible, only by asking questions. E. M. Forster declares in his classic *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) that we "are all like Scheherazade's husband, in that we want to know what happens next. That is universal and that is why the backbone of the novel has to be a story" (27). Similarly, Ashis Nandy advocates a need to question the event of Partition, and not remain silent. For Nandy, such silence poses the risk of inviting a "return of the repressed" (ii). Hence, by exploring the fragmented, silenced stories of the Partition, Kamleshwar hints at the ways personal spaces, including the minds, have been partitioned, a kind of haunting from the future. *Tamas* fits the definitions of the importance of the story as posited by Eliot and Kamleshwar, but whether it has the kind of suspense that is created by Scheherazade is debatable.

Is it a compelling story even though one knows from the beginning what will take place in the next pages, or is it so *because* one knows?

In *Tamas*, the narrative is simple yet powerful and describes human relationships and how people act in a tragedy: riots break out just before Partition in a small town where Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs had lived in harmony, despite British desire to divide them. With the riot, violence now forms the backbone of the story: violence perpetrated by those who once were acquaintances. The power of the story lies in bringing all of the violence back with visceral force, given the conflicts of the 1970s, as if to warn us that we were capable of this and remain capable of it. The author does not hold anyone directly responsible for the unrest, except when Manoharlal, a minor character airs his views after the British Deputy Commissioner Richard has left the meeting, blaming the government (Sahni 207).

A novel set in five to seven days, *Tamas* is a realist text, but it is not transparently linear: it gets fragmented too. The story begins with Nathu killing a pig, followed by the Congress party workers on a *prabhat pheri* (morning singing prayer) leading to the social work of cleaning sewage waste in an area, and then moves to a British couple, where the wife is struggling with boredom and the husband is torn between his hobby of reading, collecting and administrative work. Once the riots begin, the story shifts to the gory details of another village which has no relation to any of the characters in the first part, where the violence occurs between Muslims and Sikhs. In this part, it is more about the acrimony and perceived history of Muslim-Sikh relations where, at the end, Sikh women commit suicide by jumping into a well, and finally the story returns to the town where a relief camp has been set up and life is limping back to normalcy. The effect that Sahni creates is that of shock through sharp slices of realism.

On the other hand, *Kitne Pakistan* is even more difficult to fit into the craving for a storyline, as proposed by Forster. There are several stories jostling for space and there are at least three clear but overlapping narrative strands in the novel. One can notice various threads of stories, histories, and questions in the novel. If *Tamas* suggests a fabric with tears in it, *Kitne Pakistan* is more of a jumble of different fabrics. One jumble is that of the protagonist Adeeb who narrates and questions history and mythology with the various characters from Gilgamesh to Indra and Babur to Dara Shikoh mentioned above. In parallel, there is the jumble of Adeeb who runs away from his imaginary court to spend time with Salma, with whom he has an extra-marital

affair. In the third jumble, Adeeb the writer (who is often difficult to distinguish from the narrator), looks for the stories of Boota Singh, Zainab, and Vidya, and other snippets like that of an old man who collects tears of downtrodden, exploited, tortured and dying humans in order to understand the human plight. Though the writer tries or pretends to wrap up all these fragmented stories in the end, the reader is left with a series of lingering questions rather than the story of Vidya, Adeeb, or Salma. What happens to the quest of Gilgamesh to find the cure of death? Who removed several chapters from the *Baburnama*? Was Aurangzeb a Muslim ruler or simply a ruler? Why did Hiroshima pay the price of scientific achievements? These (and others) are important questions, not unlinked in Kamleshwar's mind to the historic Partition of 1947, and that is the idea behind writing such a novel: Kamleshwar has reiterated that "I am five thousand and 43 years old" or "I am five thousand and 73 years old," five thousand being the age of the Indian civilization or of all civilizations, and the other number denoting his age at the time of the interviews (Sahitya Akademi, 2014). The progress and fragmentation in *Tamas* have to do with the Indian sub-continent, but in *Kitne Pakistan* the Indian sub-continent is part of a larger engagement with progress and fragmentation.

### **Hope and Utopia**

In their *Introduction to Literary Trauma Studies*, Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja, paraphrasing literary critic and leading theorist Cathy Caruth, write that "what returns to haunt the victims in narratives of trauma is not only the reality of the event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (6). This approach emphasizes belatedness as constitutive of the temporal structure of trauma: trauma is characterized by a delayed response to an overwhelming event that cannot be processed at the time of its occurrence but manifests itself through intrusive thoughts, flashbacks or nightmares." (Davis and Meretoja 4). In this light one can situate the writing of *Tamas* as Sahni wrote about the incidents of Partition in 1973 as his memories were triggered by the Bhiwandi riots. The incidents narrated were gloomy and full of despair but in the end, it seems that Sahni has processed the trauma somehow (by writing perhaps). The hopeful ending of the novel offered by Sahni, perhaps can be seen as an event that brings together many characters of the novel, who are shown praying for peace. Here is a paragraph that is indicative of hope.

They were still wrangling over it when they heard the loud honking of a vehicle. Devdutt rushed up to the Chairman and proclaimed: 'Gentlemen, the peace bus has arrived. Our first round will start from here. I would request our President, (he Vice-Presidents and other members—as many of them as can be accommodated in the bus—to join us on this important mission. A loud-speaker has been fitted on the bus. The bus will address the public, turn by turn.'

The bus was painted in large red and white stripes—the bus of peace. From the four corners of its roof flew Congress and Muslim League flags.

"Where's the Union Jack?' Manoharlal quipped.

Then the slogan shouting began.

'Hindu Muslim unity zindabad!'

'Peace Committee zindabad!'

People on the road looked at the bus curiously. A man sat next to the driver's seat holding a microphone and shouting slogans. (Sahni 234)

The passage is almost the end of the novel where all the important characters have gathered after the curfew and trying to make peace in the troubled times. Despite unease about each other, everyone is trying to adjust with one another. The leftist Devdutt is the bridge between different ideologies such as congressmen and league people. There is a hope in this paragraph that though there is a riot in the background, things will be better with the slogans of Hindu-Muslim unity and idea of peace. In the midst of all these characters Murad Ali—the lynchpin of the riot also sits and holds the microphone. The novel tries to portray that despite all the differences, violence perpetrated by people against each other, there is a possibility, a hope to exist together forgetting or putting the trauma behind. The slogans of peace and unity reverberates in the air however fragile it is. This paragraph pushes the novel towards a hopeful ending. The trauma is not yet processed but the people are trying to make peace.

On the other hand, Kamleshwar's *Kitne Pakistan* doesn't give us hope in the ending but a utopian idea of a tree, a Bodhitree – where Buddha got enlightenment. The fragmented narrative of the troubled times of the 1990s all over the world, the history of Indian Partition (which the novel has dealt with) and traumatic personal stories ends with the utopian intention rather than a definite design of hope:

'But how did you...? I mean...'

‘You mean that I’m blind, don’t you? Well, because of my blindness, I can see everything so clearly.’

‘But, what will you do there? What possibly hope to achieve? I mean, what is your reason for wanting to go there?’

‘I shall plant trees.’

‘Trees?’

‘Yes. Bodhivriksh...banyan trees. Banyan saplings are what I carry in my bag. Like Shiva, the roots of the banyan can absorb all poisons. At Pokhran, I shall plant the first bodhivriksh. The second one shall be planted in the Chagai Hills, once I have crossed the border. So, I’ll be on my way.’

As the aadeeb looked on, Kabir’s white cane took the first step. His feet followed (Kamleshwar 367).

Here Adeeb is talking to Kabir about the nuclear tests and asking him what he is going to do and Kabir answers that he is going to plant a bodhitree, a connection to Buddha and also the connection to codename of the nuclear tests. Buddha smiles. Whether planting trees will solve the problems of nuclear tests or not but metaphorically it gives the hope of a utopian world where every problem will have a solution and there will be peace. That’s the utopian dream of the writer in these lines and he is saying through Kabir who is known as a secular character who criticized the religious fervor always in his sakhis, and sabads. Here Kabir and Buddha are symbols of peaceful existence and a utopian world full of hope.

### **The Question of The Hero**

The fragmentation of the novel can also be understood through a common point shared by both these novels: the lack of a hero in the mainstream Western sense of a novel’s central protagonist. These novels are not about a central character, a self that makes sense of others, but about many characters who play their roles simultaneously without dominating the plot. It is difficult to know in *Tamas* which character Sahni or his narrator is closest to, because all these characters exist in the periphery of the central theme of violence. In the later part of the novel when the riots have begun, the centrality of even these disparate characters changes and rather than individuals, the tense situation and/or a space becomes central. For instance, in a gurdwara where all the Sikhs of the village have congregated, the environment seems to become a character, where one cannot see any faces but feel the heat of impending doom, a

moment that ends with the suicide of the womenfolk who jump into the well. Afterwards when the riots have stopped, the character of Aankda Babu (literally, Statistics Man<sup>6</sup>) is momentarily placed in the center: it is to him that riot-affected people narrate their stories. Aankda Babu is not outwardly sympathetic, but through him the degree of madness is shown in detail. For instance:

I don't want your stories!' the *Babu* admonished the man in front of him. 'I want figures...' But Kartar Singh, who was sitting in front of his table with folded hands, continued as before: [...]

The *Babu* looked at Kartaar Singh annoyed. He wanted figures and these people were wasting his time by showing him their wounds (Sahni 214).

Murad Ali, who is mentioned only thrice in the novel, is one of the lynchpins of the story, but his dialogues are limited and only addressed to Nathu in the beginning of the novel, when he instructs him to kill the pig. Thereafter, he appears like a ghost and then as a common man towards the end without any remorse about creating a riot, playing the role of a cog in the machinery. The violence of the slaughtering of the pig and the women committing suicide are the most powerful parts of the novel. It is not about characters, but about the shocking tragedy of Partition and the vicious atmosphere created between the communities.

Kamleshwar achieves a similar feat of narrating a multitude of stories without going deeply into the individuality of a character in *Kitne Pakistan*, but, interestingly, he does this through his protagonist, Adeeb. There are numerous characters in the novel, but everyone seems to be related to Adeeb. The author even plays around with the name Adeeb, which means a scholar or an enlightened writer, generally a Muslim name. When he falls in love with Salma, and their faiths come in between their love, a dialogue by her breaks the illusion (which the reader shares) of Adeeb, given his name, being a Muslim:

Why don't I become a Hindu and you a Muslim — just so that we may live in peace? The Muslim mindset is quite willing to accept a Muslim man marrying a Hindu woman, but it will never allow a Hindu man to share a Muslim woman's bed. So, why don't we

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<sup>6</sup> An officer appointed to count deaths and note down the loss of properties of people.



interchange our religious identities just to appease people like Naim, so that they'll leave us alone? Otherwise, such people will never let us be. (Kamleshwar 118)

The character of Adeeb seems to be fluid, living in different times and spaces simultaneously. The only other constant character is his orderly, helper, guide, and at times friend, Mahmood, who keeps track of Adeeb's court proceedings, his personal adventures with Salma, and his life as a storyteller. Mahmood is a man from the qasba, who struggles to make sense of things and questions the intellectual Adeeb as well. This is a subtle difference, that between the small-town man and the more universal man, and their relations: among other things it complicates the equation of cosmopolitanism with metropolitanism, as Khair (2015) puts it in, when he argues that small towns might contain their own histories of "universal" cosmopolitanism.

Adeeb is essentially a symbol of the liberal humanist intelligentsia of India, who are genuinely worried about the political situation of India and the world. In that light, Adeeb is a character who is not important as an individual, but only because of the myths and traditions which have formed him into a composite self. That is why readers find Adeeb in support of the ideas of Dara Shikoh rather than Aurangzeb: his preference is for a composite selfhood rather than some pure, united conception of the self. Hence, Adeeb is misleading as a character, if assessing the novel along the lines of a coherent, consistent, given selfhood as etched by Ian Watt (1987) in his understanding of the psychological underpinning of the novel. Adeeb is a character in a different sense, more as a collocation of different bits and ends. He speaks up for other characters too, accentuating their plurality in the face of monolithic readings of their actions: for instance, Adeeb also defends or tries to clear the air on Babur for demolishing the temple in Ayodhya and talks about Jinnah being sad because of Partition (Kamleshwar 42).

Being more than just a character, one can catch glimpses of Aankda Babu in Adeeb, especially when Adeeb becomes the storyteller and narrates the tales of Boota Singh, Zainab, and Vidya— individual stories related to Partition, the fragmentation is evident in these stories and in the ways these characters are not fully developed, which are disjointed yet powerful because of the human trauma embedded in them. Aankda Babu, who seems annoyed with the sad stories, nevertheless listens. Adeeb is not annoyed, but he looks for stories that lack a closure and himself provides tentative closures for each of them.

If in *Tamas* the character of Partition is scattered throughout the narrative, dissipated among strong characters that are not central to the complete narrative, or underpinning it all the way, as would be the case in a mainstream Western novel, in *Kitne Pakistan* there is a seemingly central character, pulling together various bits and ends, struggling to make sense, or to make sense through his small town interpreter, Mahmood, but without ever being a united, given self.

The narrative in *Tamas* shores up fragments against a great ruin whereas the narrative at work in *Kitne Pakistan* gives us a great, seemingly solid edifice, which changes shape with every step into it, sometimes even dissolving into smoke. The personal stories or bodies move around not fully realized at times. How much of this has to do with generational matters and how much with generic differences? In other words, are we talking of differences between a largely realist text, written within a modernist tradition, and a postmodern text, written well into the decade of magic realism? Or are we talking of the differences between an author, who had experienced the historical partition of 1947, been forced to flee because of it, and an author who was an adolescent in 1947, and lived in a state that was not partitioned? Perhaps it is not important to answer this question, even if it can be answered. What is important is the element that has come up almost unbidden in my attempt to answer these questions: how, in different and telling ways, the two authors deal with a violent fragmentation that Sahni extends beyond 1947 to the 1960-70s when he wrote *Tamas*, and that Kamleshwar expands into the entire world. In both their cases, though in different ways, Partition represents an on-going tragedy.

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